

TRAFFICKING OF NIGERIAN GIRLS IN ITALY

The Data, the Stories, the Social Services





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TRAFFICKING OF NIGERIAN GIRLS IN ITALY THE DATA, THE STORIES, THE SOCIAL SERVICES

ROME, APRIL 2010



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*“No experience is too lowly
to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning.
The more personal and intimate the source
of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message.
The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund
of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception.”*

(Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group)

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FOREWORD



The Italian Cooperation has taken on a new holistic vision. This new approach, based on the belief that it is necessary to invest in new generations for a sustainable development, is grounded within the United Nations Charter of the Rights of the Child, which recognizes underage minors as the subjects of rights, rather than mere object of needs.

In a manner coherent with this new mindset, the Italian Cooperation has been focusing on the principles of the child and the adolescent's best interests, of non-discrimination, of the right to life, and on the principles of development, equal opportunities and participation.

Italy has always been committed to the fight against trafficking of children. The structured response it has organized to confront this issue has been internationally recognized as a leading strategic approach among other countries of the European Union. Through an intervention integrating the specific legislation produced by our Parliament, the Government's activities and the targeted interventions of the Development Cooperation, our Country has set up an effective strategy that aims to create a protection network for young victims of trafficking both in Italy and in the countries of origin benefiting from our interventions.

For its part, within the framework of its Guidelines on Children's Issues, the Italian Cooperation provides a specific commitment to "Combat the phenomenon of the human market and trafficking in underage persons through prevention activities, also in coordination with distance support programmes and, when necessary and with due precaution, international adoptions".

Because of its very nature, the crime of trafficking requires collaboration between different Countries and it is of crucial importance to know of local services available and the routes where taken by the traffickers.

The added value of Development Cooperation in combating this phenomenon is given by a twofold intervention strategy, in view of the complex variables that come into play while addressing this problematic issue. On one hand, it is crucial to address the institutions responsible on both the national and decentralized levels, strengthening their capacities of analysis and intervention. On the other hand, it is considered imperative to intervene on the local level, by supporting and strengthening civil society organizations, both secular and religious, selected among the most committed and qualified organizations in the field of children rights, which can concretely implement the commitments taken vis-à-vis the arising needs and the necessary ensuing actions.

Nigeria is the first African country to specifically ask for an Italian intervention to address the appalling problem of trafficking in minors and young women from Nigeria to Italy. Italy

has responded to this request with an initiative entrusted to UNICRI, which was funded in two different stages. The programme has strengthened the relationships between the most qualified institutions responsible for combating trafficking in both Countries through the exchange of information and investigative methodologies. The initiative targets minor girls in particular, analysing the factors that tend to discriminate women, adolescent and minor girls within their communities of origin. A particular attention is devoted to institutional capacity building and strengthening of monitoring and protection mechanisms in the framework of bilateral cooperation with Nigeria in order to better counter transnational organized crime.

The present research has been carried out within this initiative by PARSEC. This research is a useful tool not only to understand the phenomenon of trafficking of young Nigerian women in Italy and the services available to assist victims, but also to compare individual realities existing in Italy: only by sharing information and knowledge about this problematic issue, is it possible to contribute to a decisive and effective response to prevent and combat this phenomenon in all its complexity.

I would like to thank UNICRI and especially the staff who have followed the project since its outset, the PARSEC Association and its research team for making it possible to realize this research and the Working Group on the Rights of the Child of Central Technical Unit UTC - DGDC.

Maria Chiara Venier

Social Policies Expert

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PREFACE



The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings is a constantly growing one, which has been recognized since the nineties as a severe crime worldwide. In the last decade in particular, certain forms of the phenomenon have gradually assumed greater importance, especially those related to the sexual exploitation component, which represents one of the most lucrative activities for transnational organized crime.

Socio-economic factors affect society as a whole, but minors and women predominantly so, as they constitute a group that is particularly vulnerable to trafficking. As a matter of fact, the victims of trafficking are mostly young women and minor girls: they are subjected to forced prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation. While violating human rights, sexual trafficking continues to take place in almost every country of the world, be it a place of origin, transit or destination.

The phenomenon has been actively contrasted by various means on national and international levels. However, organized criminal groups are quickly adjusting their network dynamics and trafficking thus continues to provide them substantial economic benefits.

Italy, as a destination country as well as a transit one, is conveniently located on the cross-road of two major trafficking routes from east to west and from south to north. UNICRI has been actively involved in efforts to reduce trafficking in human beings for purposes of sexual exploitation, through a wide range of applied research activities and technical programmes of intervention in different countries.

UNICRI's Programme "Preventing and Combating Trafficking of Minors and Young Women from Nigeria to Italy," funded the Development Cooperation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was implemented in collaboration with the UNODC Office in Nigeria, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP), and various Italian and Nigerian NGOs. This follow-up of the pilot programme, which implemented from 2002 to 2004, aimed to: create the conditions to lessen the exposure and the vulnerability of young Nigerian women and minors to traffickers through their educational, economic, social and cultural empowerment and awareness raising campaigns; support Nigerian authorities in fighting against trafficking and organized crime; and to assist victims of trafficking and foster their successful reintegration in their areas of origin.

This publication is a research study on the services and social protection interventions in favour of minor Nigerian girls who are victims of trafficking in Italy. The survey, which was conducted by a team of researchers from Parsec Association coordinated by Professor Francesco Carchedi, follows a previous research conducted in 2004 by the Universities of Turin and Benin City, aimed at exploring the process of trafficking from Nigeria, from

recruitment to the journey towards Europe, up to exploitation in Italy. From a comparison of the two studies, it appears that all the essential components of the trafficking of young Nigerian women seem to follow a well established pattern, whose main features have not changed from the first study. The aim of the study was to highlight the particular aspects of trafficking from Nigeria, especially those related to minors, while examining the specific needs and characteristics of these services through a qualitative research approach.

The methodology is based on quantitative and qualitative surveys conducted in the Italian regions most affected by this phenomenon. In conclusion, the analysis emerging from the report provides useful recommendations in terms of social protection to the victims in Italy and for better contrast against criminal organizations dealing with trafficking.

As for the Italian territory, the main trends, which had already been identified in 2004, are re-confirmed, both in terms of the areas most affected by the phenomenon of trafficking of young Nigerian women, and in terms of the exploitative system in the prostitution market, thereby confirming the results of the research conducted in the pilot phase of the programme.

Using official data from the Department for Equal Opportunities on victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, this study also produces an estimate of the phenomenon on the Nigerian target population.

As for the areas most affected by the presence of Nigerian victims, the evidence indicated that, in addition to the well known areas of the Piedmont region (notably Turin), Lombardy, Veneto (mainly Verona), Emilia Romagna and Campania (provinces of Caserta and Naples), in the recent years new territorial realities have also been characterized by a strong presence of Nigerian women, including many underage girls.

Among these, there are specific urban areas of particular concern. In northern Italy, these are: Asti and Novara, the area of Garda Lake, Abano Terme and Mestre. In central Italy, there are the coastal areas, such as the one descending from Pisa and Livorno to Grosseto, or that of Lazio around Civitavecchia and Ostia, but also inland from Arezzo, Perugia, up to Terni. In southern Italy, the areas affected are the ones of Castel Volturno and Mondragone, followed by the shoreline Battipaglia, the suburban areas of the major cities in Puglia (Foggia and Bari, Lecce and Brindisi), the Calabria coastline between Corigliano and Crotona and between Lamezia Terme and Tropea; there has also been a strong increase in the presence of Nigerians also in Sicily, in the Palermo zone and in the coastal area between Messina and Catania. In further support of these findings, the data issued by the National Anti-Mafia Bureau shows that the Anti-Mafia District Departments was engaged to a greater extent in the investigation of human trafficking in Trieste, Turin, Perugia, Rome, Naples, Bari and Lecce.

This study reconfirms the modalities of recruitment in the country of origin, and of exploitation upon their arrival in Italy. It is therefore a pattern that follows a well established paradigm, consisting of recruitment practices and subjection of victims, travel routes and known forms of exploitation.

The research describes the control system of the victim through the whole process centred on a strong psychological subjection, which, in many cases, is tied to traditional practices of *woodoo*, thereby confirming the analysis of the previous research. The report also analyzes the multiple forms of dependence which these young victims are dramatically subjected to.

The research also focuses on the system of exploitation and on the diverse composition of criminal groups that manage trafficking from Nigeria, by tracing in broad terms the different actors involved and their roles. The strong prevail of females in this dreadful phenomenon is proven: from recruitment to exploitation, trafficking from Nigeria is confirmed as a "business of women", although men are involved in specific supporting roles of surveillance, courier services, or as controllers and boyfriends of the *maman*.

Finally, the report also contains an interesting analysis of the social services and protection practices taken in respect of minors.

UNICRI would like to thank Parsec Association for the work performed and all those without whom this Programme could not have been accomplished: Vittoria Luda di Cortemiglia (Project Coordinator), Francesca Bosco (Assistant of the Project Coordinator) and the staff of UNICRI Global Crimes Unit, in particular Galya Terzi and Stephanie Near, who worked on the data and the final drafts of the report, and with their tireless contributions have followed every phase of the activities in Italy and Nigeria.

On behalf of UNICRI, we wish to express our gratitude to the Directorate General of Italian Development Cooperation for making the implementation of this project possible and for their strong support to UNICRI during the course of the entire programme.

Angela Patrignani
Head of Global Crimes Unit at UNICRI

INTRODUCTION



1.1 The subject of the survey, its objectives and sub-objectives

The following Report is the final synthesis of the survey committed by UNICRI to Associazione Parsec, titled “Analysis of transformations in the phenomenon of trafficking in young women from Nigeria, the availability of community-based social services and perspectives for implementing appropriate social protection responses”. This study is following another study committed by UNICRI to the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Turin¹ published six years ago. Our study is in part a follow-up to the previous one with the aim to assess any changes that may have taken place in the overall cycle of trafficking and exploitation, but it mostly centres on the new and still unexplored factors that have arisen in recent years. We specifically refer to practices of subjugation and exploitation addressed to young persons that are socially highly vulnerable.

Starting from this perspective our study has a threefold objective. First, we worked to attain a full picture of the quantitative and qualitative features of the trafficking of Nigerian girls for commercial sexual exploitation in Italy. Utilizing the official data and the estimated figures at our disposal, we focussed on the ratio between adults and minors involved in forced prostitution - disaggregating those of Nigerian nationality. In assessing the possible changes in coercion practices, we gave particular attention to the practice of *woodoo*², evaluating, as far as possible, whether organized crime still use it in the same manipulative and exploitative way they did years ago.

The second objective was to understand how girls manage to free themselves from trafficking and how the main actors engaged in the fight against trafficking (police force, local authorities and territorial services) support them. We analysed how victims get in touch with social protection services, the kind of responses they receive from them and how girls manage to regain their autonomy. Last, we tried to understand the internal dynamics of social services, from those engaged in the first contacts to those that deal with rehabilitation and social re-integration and employment, highlighting the difficulties that social service providers themselves encounter when they take Nigerian girls under their care.

We also focussed on the training needs as directly expressed by providers who deal personally with Nigerian girls, one of the aims of our survey being to verify whether the community social services are able to meet the specific needs of these highly vulnerable girls. The difficulties facing service providers arise not only from language and cultural barriers but also from the specific exploitative practices victimising the young Nigerians: on the one hand, the financial debt that binds the victims and their families to the exploiters and, on

1 UNICRI, *Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy – La tratta delle nigeriane in Italia*, Turin: United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2004. Available at: http://www.unicri.it/wwwd/trafficking/nigeria/docs/rr_prina_eng.pdf

2 The word *woodoo* – following the name of the religion – is spelled differently, according to the language used. The most utilized spellings are *woodoo*, *voodoo*, *vodu*, *vodo* and, *vudu*. We believe that we cannot read the *woodoo* religion as a set of primitive superstitions and, as such, implying the believers’ cultural inferiority.

the other hand, the agreement for paying back this debt - often sealed with the manipulative use of *woodoo or ju ju* rites - that chain the young women and their families economically, morally and psychologically to their exploiters.

These factors play a role as far as adult women are concerned as well but due to their young age, the impact on girls is much stronger and more binding. The following are the specific objectives around which the action oriented research has been carried out:

- a. "Second level" quantitative and qualitative background survey, utilizing the main documentation currently available in Italy. We utilized the most recent data (December 2007) of the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in order to quantify the total number of officially recorded users of protective services (Art. 18, Law 289/98 and Art. 13, Law 228/03). Partially utilizing these data and those of the field research, we were able to assess how many Nigerian women and girls are involved in commercial sexual exploitation;
- b. Gathering data and information via in-depth interviews/conversations with key-witnesses, such as members of the Police Force, social service providers and experts. The acquired information enabled us to reassess the overall picture of trafficking with respect to the above-mentioned objectives of our study. Gathering information on some aspects of the life of sexually exploited Nigerian minors in order to analyse the mechanisms that are at the core of the overall cycle of the human trafficking and its most important phases;
- c. Three case studies carried out in three different public or private services: Associazione Jerry Masloo, that within Centro Fernandes (Caritas of Caserta) manages a medical center, Associazione Liberazione e Speranza, active in the Province of Novara and, the service "Città e Prostituzione" run by the Municipality of Venice. The three case studies were selected for the high presence of Nigerian women (minors and adults) among their beneficiaries.

1.2 Methodology and design

The methodology of the action oriented research is based on a quantitative and qualitative approach and the use of diversified sources. This methodology allowed the research team to work in two directions. First, to address the different cognitive levels of the issues under examination, ranging from the analysis of the available documentation to in-depth interviews/conversations focussed on specific facets of the trafficking phenomenon (including the possibility of assessing the incidence of Nigerian girls), and a methodical observation of social services specialized in the protection of the young Nigerian victims. Second, it allowed us to clarify the dynamics that are found in the different services between the social operators and the young Nigerian girls and the weaknesses in their professional skills.

Three methods were used for gathering data and information: one for the interviews with the key-informants; another for analysis of the case studies on the social services engaged with Nigerian girls and, a last one for interviewing Nigerian minors under the care of pro-

tective services. The completed interviews were 102 to which 10 reports (each related to a girl) acquired from some social services must be added. The total documents and protocols are therefore 112 units, as shown in Box No. 1.

<i>Box No. 1</i> <i>Number of interviews and Reports</i>	
Individuals	Number of interviews/reports
Key-informants	95
Minors – face to face	7
Minors – indirectly / reports from social services	10
Total	112

The form addressed to key-informants is composed of 10 sections, specifically constructed in order to understand the main facets of the phenomenon in comparison with the different local communities under scrutiny, the social profile of the Nigerian girls, place of origin, recruiting techniques, the journey and arrival in Italy, and the practices involved in subjection, submission and exploitation. Another section of the grid comprises a set of questions concerning the initial contact and subsequent relations with the social services and the mechanisms underlying the relationship between service providers and the girls. Other questions assess the quality of the protection process, the personnel's training needs and efforts to improve the effectiveness of service response.

The form for the case studies is also divided into 10 sections with the aim of understanding the organizational structure of the community-based social services, the activities they perform and the services they provide. The form highlights the girls' main features, the interactions between them and the service providers, and the operation of the services in terms of daily management, orientation legal assistance, health and psychological services, economic support, expenses and consumption, education and language classes, professional training and job placement, free time. One of the sections of the grid deals with the conclusion of the process, the discharge from the service and following processes for social insertion.

The third form was prepared for facilitating the interviews with the girls. It also follows some of the issues addressed in the first form, i.e. a brief personal profile, the ways in which the girls kept in touch with the *sponsor* or the *maman* (when and if dealing with two different individuals), the oath and total amount of the contracted debt, the journey and arrival in Italy, forms of exploitation, how the girls were able to detach themselves from the organization, their plans for the future. We must underline here that meeting and interviewing young trafficked girls proved to be a very hard task indeed. Only 7 face-to-face interviews were conducted: 2 in Rome, 2 in Trani, 1 each in Castel Volturno, Pisa and Asti. As already stated, ten Reports written by social service providers engaged in the protection

programme must however be added to these 7 interviews.

The ten individual reports³ we already mentioned that have been realized by the services operators for use in their daily activity must be added. The content of these reports gave a precious contribution to the results of the research. The operators safeguarded the anonymity of the girls by cancelling out the girls names before sending the reports to the research team. This report includes only 4 cases directly dealing with the personal experiences of very young victims that were specifically collected for the survey.

3 The reports were acquired by the Associazione Donne in Movimento (2 reports), Parsec (3 reports), Cooperative Oasi (3 reports) and, the Service against prostitution of the Municipality of Venice (2 reports).

THE SIZE OF THE PHENOMENON
AND THE RATIO BETWEEN THE NIGERIAN
AND THE OTHER GROUPS.
THE OFFICIAL DATA ON THE USERS
OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND
THE ESTIMATED FIGURES



2.1 The most recent data

The Department for Equal Opportunities published the most recent data on trafficking in human beings committed for the purpose of sexual exploitation within the framework of its Call for proposals No. 7 (June 2006 – June 2007)⁴. These data, together with the previous ones, are found below, in Table No. 1 and Table No. 2. The two tables show the number of victims (adults and minors) that the territorial social services provided for starting from the first Call (2000 - 2001) to Call No. 7 (2006)⁵. In the first period under scrutiny (Table 1) - (between 2000 and 2003) a high reduction of the Albanian (-77%) and Nigerian (-59.2%)⁶ nationals is registered, together with a relevant increase of the Romanians (+281%). The next phase (Table No. 2) - from 2003 to 2006 - marks important changes, mostly as far as the Nigerian group is concerned. Contrary to all the other groups, this one increases of 25% vis-à-vis the preceding period.

4 Following Art. 18 of Law 286/98 (on foreign immigration) and Art. 13 of Law 228/09 (“Measures against slavery”), the Department for Equal Opportunities delivers financial resources for social protection interventions which are distributed through annual open Calls for projects.

5 For data related to the people reported for crimes of human trafficking and slavery, see: Senato della Repubblica– Camera dei Deputati, Comitato per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, *Relazione. La tratta di esseri umani e le sue implicazioni per la sicurezza della Repubblica*. Speaker Mr. Francesco Rutelli, MP, approved on April 29, 2009 (Doc. XXXIV,) Rome: 2009, p. 35 ff.

6 As showed in Table 1, the figures reported in the Call for project No. 1 (2000/2001), are rather high, the Nigerian group counting 1,440 units on a grand total of 2,785 cases. The data registered the requests for help coming from the victims that organizations such as associations, voluntary groups and social intervention cooperatives had intercepted from February 1998, i.e. from January of the same year, when Law No. 40 was promulgated. The Art. 16 of this Law provided for the victims’ social protection, substantially granting legitimacy to those bodies and agencies that already worked in this field. The Call gave the opportunity to them to report the victims that they had been previously intercepted , adding them to those intercepted during the social interventions of that year (2000/01). This applying to the Nigerian group as well. This explains why the figures for that year were so high and why they were never matched with similar ones in the following years. As a matter of fact the total figures of the Department of 2000 amounted to 1,700 victims while for 1998 and 1999 they amounted to 400 and 650 units respectively. See: Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità - Commissione per l’attuazione dell’Art. 18, *Relazione interna. Alcune considerazioni dei dati relativi al programma di protezione sociale*, Rome: January, 2001, p. 6.

Table No. 1
Countries of origin and number of the victims of trafficking (adults and minors) registered by the social services (ex art. 18) – 2000 - 2003 (Calls for proposals No. 1 and No. 4) (Fluctuations in absolute value and %)

Countries	Call No. 1 (2000)		Call No. 4 (2003)		Fluctuations – January, 2000 – 2003	
	a.v.	%	a.v.	%	a.v.	%
Nigeria	1,440	51.7	588	31.7	-852	-59.2
Morocco	77	2.8	-	-	-77	-100
Albania	566	20.3	129	7	-437	-77.2
Moldavia	134	4.8	141	7.6	+7	-5.2
Romania	127	4.6	485	26.2	+358	281.9
Ukraine	141	5.1	138	7.4	-3	-2.1
Russia	54	1.9	84	4.5	+30	55.5
Others	246	8.8	288	15.5	+42	17.1
Total	2,785	100	1,853	100	-932	-33.5

Source: elaboration by PARSEC based on data of the Department for Equal Opportunities

This increase, registered by the official sources, puts the Nigerian nationals at the top of the list of those groups which are historically most involved in trafficking in sexual exploitation and whose victims have been taken under the care of by the social protection services in the last decade. As a matter of fact, this group, including both adult women and young girls, constitutes the 41% of all the people under the services care, positions itself in the middle between the percentage registered in the first part of the years 2000 (51.7% and that registered at the end of the first five years of 2000 (2003-2004), i.e. 31.7%.

Table No. 2
Countries of origin and number of the victims of trafficking (adults and minors) registered by the social services (ex art. 18) – 2003 - 2006 (Calls for proposals No. 4 and No. 7) (Fluctuations in absolute value and %)

Countries	Call No. 4 (2003)		Call No. 7 (2006)		Fluctuations – April, 2003 – 2006	
	a.v.	%	a.v.	%	a.v.	%
Nigeria	588	31.7	735	41.2	147	+25.0
Morocco	-		-	-	-	-
Albania	129	7.0	91	5.1	-38	-29.5
Moldavia	141	7.6	77	4.3	-64	-45.4
Romania	485	26.2	461	25.8	-24	-5
Ukraine	138	7.4	65	3.6	-73	-52.8
Russia	84	4.5	53	3.1	-31	-36.9
Others	288	15.5	301	16.9	13	4.5
Total	1,853	100.0	1,783	100	-70	-3.7

Source: elaboration by PARSEC based on data of the Department for Equal Opportunities

The data from the Department for Equal Opportunities show us that, starting from 2004, while the other groups historically involved in forced prostitution tend to decrease their presence in the dedicated services, the Nigerian one showed an increase of 25%⁷. As shown in Table No. 3 below, the Nigerian group taken under the care by the services reaches a percentage of 12.6% as far as minors are concerned (25 cases over a total of 198 cases registered in 2006 – 2007, Call for proposal No. 7).

These percentages place the Nigerian group in the second place immediately after the Romanian, the latter counting for 73.2% (145 cases). During 2006 and 2007 the percentage of the Nigerian girls taken under the care of the dedicated services goes back to the percentage registered in the years included between 2000 and 2003, i.e. 13.6% (with reference to the first 3 Calls for proposals). The current 12.6% (with reference to the data of Call for proposal No. 7), in respect to the years between 2004 and 2006 (Calls for proposals No. 5 and No. 6) – whose average is almost 20% - substantially reflects a significant drop.

⁷ One of the reasons for the Romanian group downward trend is its accession to the European Union in January 1st, 2007 and the enforcement of the free circulation agreement. According to some interviews (Int. No. 16, 63, 64, 89 and 93) this trend directly influences the data collection since, *de facto*, it causes, on the one hand, an underestimation of the Nigerian group and on the other hand an overestimation of the Nigerian one. Therefore, estimates, although important for improving the phenomenon quantitative knowledge, are to be read as an indication of its probable consistency and must be taken with caution.

Table No. 3
Nationality and number of young victims of trafficking following social protection programmes (2000 – 2007, Call for proposals No. 1 - 7)

Geographical areas and countries	Call No. 1	Call No. 2	Call No. 3	Call No. 4	Call No. 5	Call No. 6	Call No. 7	Total
	(2000 - 2001)	(2001- 2002)	(2002- 2003)	(2004- 2005)	(2004- 2002)	(2005- 2006)	(2006- 2007)	
	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.	a.v.
Africa, of which:	13	15	12	30	44	76	33	223
Nigeria	(13)	(13)	(7)	(23)	(31)	(53)	25	165
Other countries	-	(2)	(5)	(7)	13	(23)	8	(58)
East Europe, of which:	66	65	55	79	89	187	152	693
Albania	(34)	(29)	(9)	(8)	(2)	(12)	(5)	(99)
Romania	(15)	(25)	(32)	(63)	(80)	(161)	(145)	(521)
Other countries	(17)	(11)	(14)	(8)	(7)	(14)	(2)	(73)
Russia	-	1	-	-			5	6
South America	-	-	3	-		-	4	7
Other countries	8*	-	-	9	6	3	4	30
Total	87	81	70	118	139	266	198	959
% of Nigerian minors on total of minors	15.00	16.00	10.00	19.50	22.30	19.90	12.60	Average for Period 16.4

Source: Elaboration by PARSEC based on data of the Department for Equal Opportunities; * 2 are Italian nationals

Considering the overall period under examination (2000 - 2007), the Nigerian minors represented 16.4% of the grand total of under age girls taken into the care by the social services, while the Romanian group counted for 50% of the total. In absolute value, 165 have been the Nigerian minors taken in charge by the social services from 2000 to 2007 while the Romanians counted for 521.

2.2 Estimated figures, regional distribution and groups more involved in prostitution practices. The case of the Nigerian girls

Updating the national figures

As shown in Table No. 4⁸ in order to determine the estimates regarding the Nigerian group as a whole and from there extract those related to the minors, we updated the estimates that Parsec elaborated in 2006 for a previous survey on trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. The update refers to the period starting with the spring of 2008 and ending with spring 2009⁹, and it relates only to street prostitution since the Nigerian nationals, both adults and minors, do not currently appear to be engaged in behind closed doors forced prostitution. The update was possible thanks to the information gathered by the interviews to the social services operators working in the dedicated services and also to the associations and the different agencies engaged in the victims' protection programmes. Thanks to their field work, these social operators have acquired the necessary knowledge that is at the core of the quantitative and qualitative information needed for studying the phenomenon of the trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The 2009 estimates, in relation to those in 2006, show an incremental shifting of a few thousand units, varying from a minimum of 1,700 units up to a maximum of 2,000. The evaluations carried out by the operators in direct contact with the women seem to register a tendency reinforcing the presence of women involved in forced prostitution in those areas traditionally used for selling/buying sexual services. The increase is evenly distributed in the three main geographical areas of the country (North, Central, South, including the islands).

8 The updating of the estimated figures was conducted by utilising the same methodology applied for the figures published in Carchedi F., Tola V., *All'aperto e al chiuso. Prostituzione e tratta. I nuovi dati del fenomeno, i servizi sociali, le normative di riferimento*, Rome: Ediesse, 2008, p. 71 ff.

9 The figures have been drawn from a set of interviews that have been conducted from October 2008 to May 2009.

Table No. 4
Estimates on Foreign women involved in forced prostitution on the streets. Estimates by Region (from 1996 to the spring of 2000) (a.v.)

Regions	1996*		1998*		Spring 2001** Spring 2002		June 2004 June 2005***		Spring 2008/ Spring 2009	
	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min	Max	Min	Max
Piemonte		1,800	1,200	1,600	1,000	1,200	1,500	1,800	1,600	2,000
Lombardy	3,500	4,500	3,500	4,500	2,000	2,200	3,000	3,500	3,500	4,000
E. Romagna	1,200	1,800	1,200	1,600	800	1,000	800	1,200	1,000	1,200
Veneto	800	1,200	600	800	1,000	1,200	1,600	2,000	1,800	2,200
Friuli V. G.	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,000	1,400	1,000	1,400
Liguria	-	-	-	-	-	-	800	1,200	900	1,300
Other Northern regions	1,400	2,000	1,200	1,630	700	800	600	900	600	900
Sub-Total	8,100	11,300	7,700	10,130	5,500	6,400	9,300	12,000	10,400	13,000
Marche	900	1,000	400	500	250	350	700	900	700	900
Lazio	4,000	5,000	4,000	5,000	2,100	2,300	3,400	4,000	3,600	4,200
Umbria	700	800	300	400	250	350	800	1,100	800	1,100
Tuscany	1,000	1,100	900	1,100	800	1,000	1,000	1,300	1,100	1,400
Sub-Total	6,600	7,900	5,600	7,000	3,400	4,000	5,900	7,300	6,200	7,600
Abruzzo	600	700	210	300	300	500	500	700	500	700
Campania	1,500	1,700	1,000	1,500	800	1,100	800	1,100	1,000	1,200
Puglia	600	700	30	50	200	400	500	750	700	900
Basilicata	600	700	80	100	50	60	200	300	200	300
Calabria	600	700	30	50	100	150	200	300	300	400
Sicily	600	700	90	120	70	90	150	250	200	300
Sardinia	600	700	30	50	30	50	150	250	200	300
Sub-Total	5,100	5,900	1,470	2,170	1,550	2,350	2,500	3,650	3,100	4,100
Total	19,800	25,100	14,770	19,300	10,450	12,750	17,700	22,950	19,700	24,700

Source: Municipality of Rome – Parsec, *Ricerca ed Interventi sociali*

* See: *I colori della notte*, Franco Angeli, Milano, p. 112; ** See: *Piccoli schiavi senza frontiere*, Ediesse, Roma, p. 93; *** See: *All'aperto e al chiuso*, Ediesse, Roma, p. 76

In the Northern regions, beyond the most renowned places, new areas where Nigerian women and girls are trafficked for prostitution are emerging. Among these, we find the urban areas of Novara and Asti¹⁰, the areas around lake Garda, Albano Terme, the surroundings of the towns of Mestre, Ferrara to Reggio Emilia¹¹. In the Central regions, prostitution is common around the coastline that from Pisa and Livorno goes South towards Grosseto¹², the road from Arezzo to Perugia and its hinterland going from Terni on one side and to Rieti on the other, all along the Via Franchigena. In the Lazio region¹³ Nigerian street victims are trafficked along the coastline around the cities of Civitavecchia and Cerveteri/Ladispoli, the farming area of Maccarese and the outskirts of the nearby towns of Fiumicino and Ostia. Other venues for Nigerian street prostitution in this region include the coastline road that goes from Torvaianica to Anzio, the outskirts of the town of Latina and, although not continuously, the road that from the latter reaches the Campania region (in particular, the area around Fondi).

The most concerned Southern regions are also those that have registered the highest number of Nigerian presences. Above all the area around Castel Volturno and its nearby towns, i.e. from Giugliano to the North of Naples and back to Mondragone near the Lazio's borders, brushing cities and towns of the hinterland such as Pescopagano, Aversa and Battipaglia and, again, the coastline that reaches Paestum, near the Basilicata region¹⁴. In Puglia, the Nigerians working as street prostitutes are found all around the periphery of the towns of Foggia, Bari (San Giorgio and Trani), Lecce and Brindisi. In Calabria, the most concerned areas are those between Conigliano-Schiavonea and Rossano Calabro all the way down to Crotona and, again, between Lametia Terme and Tropea¹⁵. The Nigerian girls are territorially distributed in small groups and in a non continuous fashion all along the coastline and inland, near the sea. In Sicily, the most hit areas are the coastline that from the outskirts of Palermo reaches the Parco della Favorita¹⁶, the road that goes from Messina to Catania (with a strong presence in the towns themselves) and from there to Siracusa. In these last two areas, the Nigerian nationals are the most present, immediately followed by women from Romania and Colombia.

10 Piam (edited by), *Focus sul fenomeno della tratta delle donne: analisi delle trasformazioni correnti e nuove strategie di intervento di protezione sociale*, Rapporto di Ricerca, Region of Piedmont, Inter-regional project "Vie d'uscita", Asti: 2007.

11 Region of Emilia Romagna, *Relazione annuale interventi Art. 18 sul territorio nazionale*, Bologna: Region of Emilia Romagna, 2008.

12 Tognetti A. (edited by), *Aspetti innovativi del fenomeno della tratta delle donne e servizi territoriali di protezione sociale*, Rapporto di Ricerca, Region of Tuscany, Inter-regional project "Vie di uscita", Pisa: 2006.

13 Parsec (edited by), *Aspetti innovativi del fenomeno della tratta delle donne e servizi territoriali di protezione sociale*, Research Report, Region of Lazio, Inter-regional project "Vie di uscita", Rome: 2006.

14 Dedalus (edited by), *Aspetti innovativi del fenomeno della tratta delle donne e servizi territoriali di protezione sociale*, Research Report, Region of Campania, Inter-regional project "Vie di uscita", Naples: 2006.

15 Rossano Solidale (edited by), *Il traffico di donne nella Piana di Sibari, il caso di Conigliano e Rossano Calabro*, Research Report, Department for Equal Opportunities, Rossano: 2007.

16 Casa dei giovani – Progetto Maddalena (edited by), *Il traffico di donne a Palermo*, Research Report, Department for Equal Opportunities, Palermo: 2007.

The national groups most involved in street prostitution and the size of the Nigerian groups

Table No. 5¹⁷ refers to the national groups most involved in forced street prostitution and their numerical trend as it has evolved in the last decade in Italy. As shown in the Table, the Nigerian presence increases significantly over the entire decade. From the 5,000 – 6,500 units of 2000 there is a rise to 5,500 – 7,000 in 2004-2005 and from here up to 8,000 – 10,000 in the period between the spring of 2008 and 2009. Therefore, as for the period under scrutiny (2008-2009), the women forced into prostitution are – according to the proposed estimates – between 8,000 and 10,000 units, i.e. slightly over one third of the estimated grand total. This figure puts the Nigerian group at the top of the different groups involved in forced prostitution¹⁸. The current figures for the Nigerian nationals related to the last year (spring 2009) turn out to be almost equal to those elaborated in another survey carried out at the beginning of year 2000, i.e. 10,000 units¹⁹.

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- 17 These estimates were realized by utilising the percentages of the individuals under care of the social services divided by nationality, as collected by the Department for Equal Opportunities. These percentages were matched against the minimum and maximum figures deriving from the data acquired by interviewing key-witnesses. The percentages are those to be found in Table No. 2 (Call No.7) and transcribed in Table No. 4 in the column related to the last estimates (2008-2009). The percentage of the Nigerian group over the grand total is 41.2%. Matching this percentage with the estimated total of 19,700 (minimum) and 24,700 (maximum), we have 8,116 and 10,176 units respectively. For further information on the applied criteria, see: Carchedi F., Tola V. (edited by), 2008, cit., pp. 78-79.
- 18 According to the current estimates (Spring, 2009), the Nigerian group – over the all period under scrutiny – has a progressive trend while the official data of the Department for Equal Opportunities, registering the number of the units taken under the care by the territorial services, register an oscillatory trend, i.e. high in the first years of the 2000s', lower in the following years and raising again in the 2006/2007 period. A judge gives two explanations to this: first, that the Nigerian women, both adults and minors, arrived in the last years are thoroughly subdued to their exploiters and have a hard time to free themselves. That is to say that the bond with their *maman* is very strong, the control very tight making it hard to contact the social services. The second reason is due to the fact that the *maman* convince the enslaved women, especially if minors, that the social services are a direct emanation of the Police. Referring to them is exactly as if you went to the Police and, therefore, risking an immediate expulsion. These intertwined factors, playing a fundamental role in the victims' imagination, hinder them from the social services but in case of absolute need.
- 19 The Nigerian Embassy in Italy estimated that 10,000 Nigerian nationals were working as prostitutes in 2001 in Italy. We must however point out that we have no knowledge on how this estimate was collected. Nevertheless, due to the importance of the source, the Nigerian Embassy in Rome, it is a meaningful estimate. See: UNICRI, 2004, cit., p. 334.

Table No. 5
Estimated figures on the national groups most involved in forced street prostitution (a.v. and % fluctuation)

Country	Estimated figures based on nationality (2000 - 2001)			Estimated figures based on nationality (2004 - 2005)			Estimated figures based on nationality (Spring 2008- Spring 2009)		
	%	Min	Max	%	Min	Max	%	Min	Max
Nigeria	50.6	5,288	6,451	30.9	5,469	7,091	41.2	8,116	10,176
Morocco	2.7	282	344	3.6	637	826	-	-	-
Albania	20.9	2,185	2,665	6.9	1,221	1,583	5.1	1,006	1,260
Moldavia	5.2	543	663	7.5	1,327	1,721	4.3	847	1,062
Romania	4.9	512	625	27.8	4,920	6,380	25.8	5,028	6,295
Ukraine	4.9	512	625	7	1,239	1,606	3.6	709	890
Russia	1.9	198	242	4.4	778	1,009	3.1	610	765
Others	8.9	930	1,135	11.9	2,109	2,734	16.9	3,330	4,174
Total	100	10,450	12,750	100	17,700	22,950	100	19,700	24,700

Source: Municipality of Rome - Parsec, Ricerca ed Interventi sociali (2006); Unicri-Parsec, Ricerca ed interventi sociali (2009)

On the basis of these estimated figures we may assert that every year – starting in 2001 up to the spring of 2009 – from 8,000 to 10,000 Nigerian women and girls living in Italy were forced into prostitution. Concerning the overall period under scrutiny – as shown in a previous survey²⁰ – we may assert that the Nigerian component went through two *turn over* cycles. The first lasting 4 to 5 years (starting in 2001, according to the figures of the Nigerian Embassy in Italy up to 2004-2005) and, the second, lasting from 2 to 3 years (from 2006 up to the spring of 2009). This is explained by the fact that over the years and for many different reasons, there is a turn over of the exploited women. Hence, the annual presence is of 8,000 – 10,000 units, the number of minor and adult women that joined and left the sexual exploitation circuits from 2001 to spring 2009 have been between the 23,200 and 26,500²¹

20 Carchedi F, Tola V. (edited by), 2008, cit. , pp. 81-82.

21 The calculation takes under consideration that, from in the beginning of year 2001 to the spring of 2009, the number of Nigerian women and girls is somewhat between 8,000 – 10,000, and that – due to the internal turnover - they change every 4/5 years. The first turnover started in 2001 ended in 2004/2005, while the second turnover started in 2006 and will end in 2010-2011 if the exploitation model stays substantially the same at least in its main features. At the time that the estimates were figured out (spring of 2009) the second turnover is halfway through. The annual figure (8,000/10,000) has been divided by 4 and by 5, i.e. $8,000 : 4 = 2,000$ and $8,000 : 5 = 1,600$. Therefore, $2,000 + 1,600 = 3,600 : 2 = 1,800$, this last (1,800 units) representing the yearly turnover. Using the same method, if we consider the maximum figure, i.e. 10,000, we arrive at 2,250 units. By multiplying 1,800 times 7 (since the turnover has taken place in 2002) we have a maximum of 12,600 units. To this we must add another 600 units (as a result of $1,800 : 12$ months, i.e. 150 times 4 months since for 2009 the estimate relates to the first 4 months of the year) for a grand total of 13,200. We followed the same methodology for arriving at 2,250, by adding 750 units (for the 2009 segment) and therefore reaching 16,500 units. To these estimated figures of the turnover, i.e. 13,200 minimum and 16,550 maximum, we must add the 10,000 units that permanently live in Italy.

units. Table No. 5 also shows us that the Nigerian component numerically follows the Romanian, the latter slightly surpassing the former by one half (4,900 and 6,300 units against 7,800 and 10,000), proving once more that the Romanian group is the one mostly involved in forced street prostitution in Italy.

The incidence of minors registered in the different areas

The information collected by the research team shows that the presence of minors varies considerably according to the different regions. The following data is therefore supported by elaborations resulting from crossing the information gathered from the operators that monitor the phenomenon while working on the Mobile Street Units, the social services' operators and the judicial authority. According to the figures elaborated by the local social services, the incidence of young Nigerian prostitutes *vis-à-vis* the adult ones working in the Domitian area (especially around the town of Castel Volturno) can be fixed at 16-18% (on a total of 400 units). In Puglia, taking into consideration the area around Bari, the incidence of young would be around 6-8% (over 70/80 cases). Still lower is the percentage registered around Foggia where the local social operators fix a percentage of 4% to 6% over 40/40 cases. Around Corigliano-Schiavonea and Rossano Calabro down to Crotona the incidence of young Nigerians compared to adults tends to increase and sets itself around 10 and 12% (50/60 women in total). The same figure applies in Catania and Palermo, according to the local social services.

The rate of girls forced into street prostitution varies a great deal in many areas, especially in the Centre and in the North of the country. According to the persons interviewed the figures for the city of Genoa and its outskirts are placed between 5 and 6% (on a total of 70/80 women), while in the areas surrounding the cities Asti and Novara they reach approximately 10/12% (on a total of 25/30 women). The lowest rate is found in Milan and its surroundings where the estimated percentage is between 3 to 5% (400/500 women in total), reaching approximately 7, 12 and 15% in Verona, Padua and Mestre respectively (on 100-150 women)²². In Emilia Romagna (cities of Bologna and Parma and on the coastline around Ravenna, Rimini and Cattolica) the percentage is approximately 5% (150/200 total of cases). Tuscany follows the same trend while the percentages rise in the regions of Umbria (7 to 10% over a total of approximately 50 women) and of Lazio (over 400/500 women), whose mostly hit areas are the Capital's hinterlands such as in Ostia, and the Tiberina, Salaria and Tiburtina roads, around the Rome's beltway.

These different degrees of incidence²³ of young girls from Nigeria at the local level allow us to detect the areas (and sub-areas) where their exploitation is concentrated. Moreover, the presence of minors forced into prostitution becomes an important indicator for the internal configuration of the requests of sexual services in a specific geographical area or sub-area.

22 These percentages have been verified through informal conversations the research team held with Police and Judiciary authorities.

23 As already mentioned we are dealing with estimates and must be considered as indicative figures only.

At the same time, the presence of minors point out the organizational ability of the criminal groups managing the traffic of the Nigerian women since they are able to introduce minors in the prostitution market. This happens despite the great risks they objectively face with the police and the special attention the mobile street units and the territorial services pay to this issue.

Consequentially, these estimated figures determine the percentage coefficient showing the relation between Nigerian minors and adults forced into prostitution in the streets of the analysed territories. The coefficient attests itself around 8-10%²⁴. Applying this coefficient to the overall estimates related to the numerical entity of the Nigerian group for the period between the Spring of 2008 and the Spring of 2009, i.e. 8,116 and 10,117 (see: Table No. 5), we may infer that the sexually exploited minors are between 730 and 915 units in the whole of the country.

These estimates are, even if indirectly, reinforced by the data of the police force related to the Nigerian nationals arriving in Italy by boat and landing in Sicily. In 2007 (from January up to September 10th) the Nigerian component counted 705 units, i.e. 550 men and 155 women (13 of them being minors). In 2008, from January 1st to December 10th, 6,043 Nigerian nationals land in Sicily: 3,930 men, 1,803 women (310 of them being minors). The interviewed police force officials and operators share the view that many of these minors are female (“if not all of them”, according to some, Int. No. 85 and 86) and therefore are immediately included in the sexual exploitation circuits.

24 The coefficient derives by summing the maximum and minimum estimates related to the 16 mentioned territorial areas. The result of adding the percentages and dividing the result by 16 gives a minimum and maximum coefficient of 7.8% and 10.2% respectively, i.e. a rounding off of 8 to 10%.

WAYS OF EXPLOITING
THE NIGERIAN WOMEN



3.1 The *standard* way of exploitation

The four main factors

Four interconnected factors are at the core of the system exploiting Nigerian women and girls. First, the instrumental and often criminal way that the *maman* and her collaborators/recruiters put in place in exploiting the tendency to migrate of many Nigerian young people, i.e. the psychological and actual propensity of many young people to accept proposals for migrating in order to improve their living conditions²⁵, to positively respond to having dropped out of school, to contrast long-term unemployment or to exit relative poverty, deriving from economic hardship and therefore the difficulty to buy subsistence goods such as food or the difficulty to live in an adequate lodgings, or the impossibility to enter good schools or, again, the lack of a social network to count on and lack of trust in the institutions (UNODC, 2006)²⁶.

The second factor is linked to the need to find enough money for travelling abroad, in our case in Italy. This necessity pushes the person into the hands of people - and almost inevitably with organizations specialized in transferring migrants abroad - that lend money (i.e. *sponsors*), know the legal and often illegal ins and outs for acquiring the necessary documents, and know how to make a binding contract with the people they send abroad. The third factor is of symbolic and ritual significance. The woman or girl must swear in front of the *sponsor*²⁷ (the *maman* or her helpers), i.e. those lending her the money and organizing the journey, that she will pay back to the organization the amount previously established and written in the contract. In doing so the woman swears in front of the local religious leaders (generally the *baba-loa*²⁸) that she will give back the loaned amount.

The woman and the “benefactors” or “*sponsors*” - usually the *maman* alone - seal this commitment through rites that recall the traditional practices of *woodoo* or *ju ju*²⁹. The oath,

25 UNICRI, 2004, cit. , p. 334.

26 The pushing factors that UNODC detected and that shape the “desire of the young components to emigrate as an emancipation tool” from extremely disadvantaged conditions are: poverty, size of the family, lack of educational, schooling and employment opportunities (the labour market is almost invariably “black” and therefore informal); the victims’ and their families’ ignorance and unconsciousness about the risks of migrating on the basis of false promises; inadequate public policies and mistrust in the institutions because of the high corruption level; lack of well-defined rules and certainty of punishment towards the traffickers/exploiters; not well guarded borders and limited ability to control irregular emigration, especially in preventing/verify the traffic aimed at sexual exploitation. See: UNODC, *Measures to combat trafficking in human beings in Benin, Nigeria and Togo*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna: 2006, p. 25.

27 UNICRI, 2004, cit. , p. 355.

28 The *baba-loa*, or the *native-doctor* or the *père-savant*, is a *woodoo* minister, i.e. the officiant, the possessed. He is the one that talks with the *loa* (spirits and gods) and that can see people’s innermost. He is therefore a very important and charismatic figure, the spiritual head of the community. See: Sennett R., *Authority*, New York: Norton W.W. & Company Inc., 1993.

29 For some aspects of the religious practices and rituals and subjugation methods of the women fated

usually officiated by the *baba-loa* (generally a male but at times can be a woman as well) takes place in the *shiran*³⁰, the place where rituals are performed. The oath obliges the women to respect the pact and pay back once they are in the new country and are working in the job that the *maman* promised them. There is no way of negotiating this oath.

The persistence these girls show in keeping their word directly stems from the strength that also keeps their cultural model alive thanks to these ritual practices that boosters and self-professed *baba-loa* have been able to transform, thus swindling the women and the girls that want to emigrate. In these rites, performed before the departure, the *baba-loa* invokes the “spirits” and the woman gives him “small packages” (with small personal items mixed with locks of hair, pubic and armpit hairs) as a *medium* linking the woman and the *baba-loa* once she leaves the country. These rites make the woman stronger, she feels to have a better balance, in a state of possession and therefore she feels to be better fitted for obeying to the “spirits”.

For sealing the pact between the woman’s family and the *maman*, these “small packages” are given to the woman and, at times, to her father or mother as guarantors and witnesses of the undersigned pact and to the *maman*, as benefactor and *sponsor*. Once the money has been paid back (according to the promise made by many *maman*), the woman will receive her back “small packages” as a proof that the pact has been fully respected³¹.

The ways used for subjugating these women once they arrive in Italy is the fourth factor to be taken into account. The *maman* that made the departure possible and built the emigration process - oath included with the complicity of self-made *baba-loa*, sends these women and girls to their accomplices in Italy (called *maman* as well). At times these women, generally from Benin City or Lagos, contact and recruit the victims and take them personally to Italy in order to manage the subjugation period. Other times, these women are *maman* that live in Italy on a permanent basis and that regularly come back in Nigeria for recruiting new women for the sex market. Once recruited, they bring them to Italy, this is done with the help of escorts commonly called *brothers*, in order to subdue them and sexually exploit them.

to sexual exploitation and of the structures underlining sex inequalities, see: UNICRI, 2004, cit., p. 333 ff. and pp. 470-471. See also: Orobator S., *Nigeria: the phenomenon of trafficking and slavery*, Report presented at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, in May, 2009, for the NAPTIP (National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and other related Matters) study tour in Italy (May 24 - 29), Rome: 2009, p. 5.

30 See: De Martino E., *The land of Remorse: a Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*, London: Free Association Books, 2005. For a description of the house of a *baba-loa* see: Carchedi F., *Le migrazioni nigeriane, verso l'Italia. Emigranti e donne trafficate*, in Fondazione Basso (edited by), *Il traffico di donne. Il caso della Nigeria*, Research Report, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome: 2003, Section II, p. 38 ff.; Seminar on “Trafficking of human beings from Nigeria, magical and religious rites and difficulties of integration”, UNICRI, Region of Emilia Romagna, Bologna: March 27, 2009.

31 For the meaning we may give to “things”, such as the “small packages” that the woman leaves to the *maman* and to the *baba-loa*, for its symbolism and the close intentional link that from this derives to the persons involved (and that they themselves attribute to it), see: Bodei R., *La vita delle cose*, Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2009, p. 37 ff.

The debt that holds an economic, moral and psychological obligation³² (encircling these women in a “magic existential drama”, as De Martino says³³) is usually very high since very often the *maman* swindle the women by lending money in the Nigerian currency, the Naria, but pretending to be repaid in euro³⁴. The salaries these women can gain with the precarious and irregular jobs they may get once in Italy will never allow them to pay back the amount of money that was fraudulently loaned them in a well geared and finely tuned system that the *maman* have started in Italy, at least fifteen years ago. It is a system that still works on older women that are generally better aware of the risk of falling into the prostitution rings. It should therefore not come as a surprise if many young girls, that are much less aware of what could become of them once at destination, fall into the trap. It is even harder for these young girls to understand the hidden implications of such an operation when family members are the ones that organize the journey³⁵.

Some reasons for the increase in the trafficking of minors

These are the four main causes of the last 2-3 year increase of young exploited women, people interviewed claim:

- a. The relative decrease in the number of women willing to take the chance, i.e. they now realize, especially if coming from the cities, what are the risks they may incur into (Ints. No. 70 and 17). The result is an increase in recruiting young girls, easier preys that fall into the trap devised by the *maman*.
- b. In the last years, the recruitment of the potential victims - minors included - takes place in the rural villages and not anymore or exclusively in the periphery of Benin City (Int. No. 72), i.e. in the places where it is easier for the recruiting *maman* to intercept potential victims. As a matter of fact these are the rural areas characterised by the worst unfavourable social and economic conditions and where families can play a major role in pushing the girls towards a “masked” migration which already implies the possibility/

32 Carchedi F., 2003, cit, II Section, p. 9. “The monetary debt between the potential victim and the *maman* – says the Report – seems almost accidental and of little importance if compared to the moral one”. Beneluce R. in his *Breve dizionario di etnopsichiatria*, says “the debt has an economic and psychological feature from which the victim’s dependence derives”, Rome: Carocci, 2008, p.131

33 De Martino E., *Il mondo magico. Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008, p. 98-99.

34 According to the interviews and already published studies, the amount of the debt varies from 10,000 to 30,000 euro, with peaks as high as 50/60 thousand all the way to 80/100,000. See: Conso G., *La criminalità Nord Africana*. Direzione Distrettuale Antimafia di Naples, Naples: 2008, available at: <http://appinter.csm.it/incontri/relaz/17050.pdf>. See also: Becucci S., Garosi E., *Corpi globali*, Florence: Firenze University Press, 2008, p. 71. Some victims stated to have paid only around 3,000 euro for the trip to the Algerian, Tunisian or Libyan coasts. Once in Italy, they stipulated another debt – and a new oath - which, added to the first loan, reached up to 30/40,000 euro (Int. No. 72). See also: Maragnani L., Aikpitanyi I., *Le ragazze di Benin City, la tratta di nuove schiave dalla Nigeria ai marciapiedi d'Italia*, Milan: Melampo, 2006, p. 53. See also: UNICRI, 2004, cit., pp. 408-409.

35 Eghafona K. A., *The bane of female trafficking in Nigeria: an examination of the role of the family in the Benin City society*, in Awaritefe A., *Toward a sane society, Benin City: Roma Publication - Ambik Press Ltd*, 2009, p. 13.

probability of the girl's exploitation.

- c. Young people are easily cheated with ideas of "becoming successful in the fashion industry, in show business or in well paid jobs" (Int. No. 17). "Parents are told that the little girl will be protected as if she were a daughter" (Int. No. 72). The girl is reassured, "No one will ever hurt her and that her parents will stand by her, even if she is far away" (Int. No. 76). The recruiters, as demonstrated already in the previous UNICRI research³⁶, lure the potential victims by telling them "successful stories of people that have already migrated, deceiving them with the perspective of finding a proper and dignified job".
- d. "Young girls are brought up with the idea that they must migrate in order to improve the family's living conditions and, once they are 16 or 17 years old they are encouraged to leave and are delivered into the hands of the *maman/sponsor*"³⁷ (Int. No. 6).

The existing literature and a significant number of the interviews confirm that these are the main causes in the increase of the young Nigerian component in the sex market over the last two/three years, i.e. 2006/2007. The debt, coupled with the young age, makes these girls more vulnerable than the adults from the very moment they are recruited and contract the loan for the journey. Clearly, the burden of the contracted debt which "they do not even know the amount of" (Int. No. 17) will strongly influence these girls' impact with the Italian society.

This is the first and inevitable psychological *shock* both for the girls that know about the debt and for those that suddenly discover that they owe the *maman* a great deal of money: the former learn from the first time the amount due, the latter learn from the first time that they owe money. The negotiation of the loan with the *maman/sponsor* - be it the first one or that that the girl may sometimes be able to review with her - is never in favour of the latter. The *maman/sponsors* have the power to establish how much money the girl must give back, how she will get that money, how to register the returned amounts and how the accounts will be managed. All this structurally determines the victims' dependence and their progressive falling into slavery.

3.2 Age and its disguises

In the *standard* model of the exploitation cycle of the Nigerian women, as we have just described it (although some more or less relevant shifts may occur), the age of the women involved gains a rather important weight and influence. The exploitation process (recruitment, journey and trip, passing the border(s), settlement in the new country and coercion into the prostitution rings) penalises young girls more than older women since their age easily makes them potential victims of criminals that enrich themselves thanks to their victims. Richard Sennet states that in the Ibo culture (one of the ethnic groups more involved

36 UNICRI, 2004, cit.

37 UNICRI, 2004, cit. ; see also: Eghafona K. A., 2009, cit.

in trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation)³⁸ to be under age does not grant any extra protection to the young, who is considered as a subject not only by the family but of society as well³⁹. Traffickers and *maman* are therefore most attentive to the social meaning of age from the moment the necessary documents are falsified in order to allow the girl to travel to the moment of arrival and to that of settlement in the country where the actual exploitation will take place.

The age of the victim can be assigned: a) by third parties or may be self-declared (when the victim either tells her real age or cheats), depending on the different stages of the exploitation cycle, i.e. when the documents that will allow her to travel are being prepared (recruiting), during the journey and the crossing of the borders, at the arrival and, finally, when the girls are forced into prostitution; b) when the girls start a social protection programme. The social services workers are usually able to establish the girl's age but, should they not be able to do so, it is the police that, using a set of technical and scientific tools, establishes the girl's age. This happens when the girl or woman does not cooperate or when she declares an age that does not look to be likely⁴⁰.

Therefore, the age of these girls may change, according to the persons declaring it. The correct birth date is that which is reported in the official documents issued by the Nigerian local (identity card) or by the federal/state administrations (passport)⁴¹. This does not rule out however that these official documents have not been forged by the *maman*, with the help of his "collaborators".

Changing the age of a girl is a trick that may grant plenty of extra gains both when the girls are bought or sold⁴², and not only in the recruitment's initial phases but during the overall exploitation cycle as well. Assigning the official documents a very young age to the victims even further lowering that of already very young girls means that the *maman* have chosen a clear strategy in order to ensure a successful expatriation. Thus, women that are more than 18 years old – even 20 or 25 – suddenly become under-age during the recruiting stage and,

38 Nigerian women, both adults and minors, come from the Igbo (o Ibo), the Yoruba, the Bini and, the Edo Communities. Senato della Repubblica – Camera dei Deputati, Comitato per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, 2009, cit., p. 35.

39 In his book *Authority* (cit.) R. Sennett writes that the Ibo child does not have any authority, he/she is a considered a subject. T. Falola and M. M. Heaton express the opinion that on modern Nigeria, especially on the Southern Delta States, the age subdivision of society still represents the local community main hierarchical order.

40 For a close examination of these aspects, Tarzia G. (edited by), *La condizione giuridica del minore straniero non accompagnato*, in Candia G., Carchedi F., Giannotta F., *Minori erranti. L'accoglienza e i percorsi di protezione* Rome: Ediesse, 2009, p. 30 ff.

41 The falsification of documents for travelling abroad has dramatically lowered since 2004 with the institution of the electronic passport for all Nigerian nationals. This reduced the possibilities to forge travel documents, especially the passport, officials of NAPTIP affirm.

42 The interviewee (Int. No. 88) thinks that the *maman* can and actually do counterfeit official certificates. This can be detected in some of the peripheral areas of Benin City or in the surrounding rural towns. The process of changing the official records from the paper to the electronic format is experimentally under way only in Abuja, the capital city and it will be completed throughout Nigeria only within the next few years.

vice versa, very young girls may suddenly become older, if the *maman* thinks that this is the right thing to do for ensuring their expatriation at any point in time. As a person interviewed says, this can happen “when a girl’s personal documents are forged by using those belonging to an adult. Obviously, the reverse may also happen” (Int. No. 17).

When documents, real or false, are missing during the recruiting stage, the person agrees with the *maman* or with the carries/traffickers/escorts to declare any given age that she will use during the recruitment, the journey and the illegal crossing of the Italian borders.

Once in Italy, the age may change again. Withholding their real or falsified documents and personally bringing them back or sending them to Nigeria. At times this is performed by a trustworthy carrier (the *brother*, i.e. “the escort that travelled with the victims and helped them in crossing the border usually the same person that accompanied and protected them while crossing the border” - Int. No. 70) who belongs to the criminal organization that managed the expatriation and lives in Benin City or in Lagos.

Two the reasons for doing so: first, to deprive the girl of her identity, making her feel isolated and with no links to the outside world, and as such beginning the depersonalisation/dehumanization process; second, to reuse the documents for other travellers. Once in Italy and in the prostitution ring the girl’s age is either the one that she declares or the one decided by the *maman* or that which is perceived by the people the girl gets in touch with⁴³. The age may change again when entering the social protection programme. At this point is the the social workers or the police who determine the woman’s age through a set of scientific tools⁴⁴.

Consequentially, this zigzag of the victim’s age takes different significance following the different phases of the exploitation cycle, i.e. before and after the contract is stipulated, during the subjugation period in Italy, after the extinction of the debt - and the spontaneous or directed by the social services or the Police disengagement - and the begging of a new life. Generally speaking, there is a tendency to rise the potential victim’s age during the journey to Italy thus stressing the consensual and voluntary aspect of the journey⁴⁵. Contrary to this, there is a tendency to lower the age when the woman is working as a prostitute since this may attract a broader clientele. Once the women detach themselves from the exploitation rings and start their relationship with the social services, the possibility to lower or rise their age depends on basic needs (when the age is uncertain): on the one hand, be under 18 years old may be an important factor for receiving better protection but, on the other hand, it may be an obstacle in job hunting.

43 It is the *maman* that forces the girl to declare any given age. The belief that these women are minors often may generate a positive stereotype in the minds of the clients that get in touch with them.

44 When entering the social protection programme the age of the victim is established through anthropometric tests although they are not 100 per cent trustworthy especially when trying to establish the age of young individuals. Should the scientific results be uncertain, the Circular of the Ministry of Interiors of July 9, 2007, known as “Circolare Amato”, states that the decision must always be in favour of the victim, i.e. the age of the person must be reported as being under 18. In such cases the age becomes the ultimate proof for the inclusion in social protection schemes.

45 UNICRI, 2004, cit. p. 355.

For these reasons, the relationship with the local social services is based on the opportunities and the resources that can be delivered according to the victims' age. In case of a minor other actors enter into play, such as the Juvenile Court or the personal tutor⁴⁶, over and above those commonly in charge of sexually exploited persons. On the other hand, adults may have more training opportunities and better chances to enter the labour market.

3.3 The multiple dependencies of minors

The different dependencies

The condition of the Nigerian girls who are sexually exploited is made even more dramatic by their early age that puts them in a very weak social position and makes them fully dependent on a number of people. They “naturally” depend on their families, on their father or their brothers first and, on the mother and older sisters then. But they are also subjected to forms of incremental dependencies⁴⁷, i.e. forms of dependency that imply submission and coercion to behave wrongfully, losing social status and self-value. This is the condition at the core of the slavery process, the one under study in this Report.

The young girl may feel very uplifted by her parents' decision to send her abroad since she is the one entrusted to improve the family living conditions. But in reality the parents, even if involuntarily, place the child outside the family, preventing her from enjoying the solidarity that is naturally given to the other family members. As soon as they decide to borrow the money needed for the trip, the parents start the process that will eventually lead to their daughter's slavery. We may detect here two main “models” that relate to the role played by the parents, alone or together.

In the first “model” the father, with the mother as the second-lead, is the main actor (considering that they often are *de facto* polygamous families). The prestige that the father, as head of the family, holds within the men's family circle gives solemnity to the child's choice to emigrate, a choice that may look as being autonomous but that is strongly wanted by the father. She is honoured of the role she has been given: to contribute to the improvement of the family living conditions. It is the father, therefore, that makes the decision and is the guarantor in relation to the *sponsor/maman*.

In the second “model” the father is absent (due to his indifference or because, for whatsoever reasons, he is far from the family) and it is the mother to take the lead, becoming

46 Tarzia G., 2009, cit.

47 F. Viti defines as natural or ordinary the dependence within a family reflecting its hierarchy. These relations are unequal and asymmetrical but are at least partially counterbalanced by the protection granted by the main actors to the “dependants”, in a bottom-up process. The incremental dependence, instead, follows a reverse process and it implies the loss of status due to events that break the links with the original family and a loss of the “natural” dependency. Viti F., *Schiavi, servi e dipendenti*, Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2007, p. 15 ff.

the pivot of the entire transaction. In such cases the mothers usually belong to family lines within polygamous groups that, owing to the man's other marriages and the inclusion within the original family group of other nucleus have lost their original status. The decision to migrate can be taken by the girl autonomously or may be decided by her mother although the absence of the father in the decision-making mechanism diminishes its solemnity. Here, the mother is the only guarantor, although with a different weight, less solemn, of the transaction with the *sponsor/maman*⁴⁸.

In both "models", notwithstanding the different reference persons, it is the daughter that takes the full responsibility for the family's debt since she is the one leaving the family even if for fulfilling a migratory project that has been planned collectively. There is here a clear transfer of responsibilities from the father, and the mother as second lead, (first case), and, from the mother only to the daughter (second case) since it is up to her to oblige to the requests of payment that the *maman/sponsor* will address directly to her once she arrives in Italy. This transfer of responsibility is a traumatic event that results in the hyper-personalization (since she becomes the pivot of the debt) and, at the same time, a substantial depersonalization (for the material and psychological impossibility to pay back) with a progressive loss of identity within a few months from emigrating.

These girls are not expected to contribute to settle the debt according to their abilities, i.e. proportionally to the hierarchical role they have within the family but are asked to settle it by themselves, compromising – willingly or not - their psychological and physical integrity. This proxy that the parents give the daughter holds two other negative aspects: on the one hand, the parents momentarily abandon the child and, on the other hand, the girl becomes a "human pawn" to the *maman/sponsor*, as guarantee that the debt will be repaid⁴⁹ and as a productive "tool" able to acquire the needed resources in order to honour the pact.

The relationship between *maman* and the girl cannot, under any circumstance, be symmetric⁵⁰; it constantly reflects various forms of submission. It is a submission starting at the very beginning, when the family (with or without the male presence) contracts the loan with the *maman* and her accomplices; a submission that continues with the violence and

48 The same model applies if the mother is a widower and is therefore alone with her daughter or daughters, her social status being thus traditionally highly vulnerable. See: UNICRI, 2004, cit. pp. 333 – 335.

49 The condition of human pawn is transitory and limited to the time it takes for the money to be paid back. The parents still consider her their child and the *maman* knows that the human pawn will be free the minute the debt is fully settled. The *maman* are not interested in owning a person for ever, they want to make sure that the money will come back. F. Viti in his book *Schiavi, servi e dipendenti* (op.cit.) states that paying back the entire amount is a point of honour for the debtor and that the final settlement immediately frees the human pawn. The creditor cannot change this rule under any circumstance. Falola T., Heaton M. M. in *A history of Nigeria*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 4, affirm that "the persons that are usually given as human paw are the most pliant to the new conditions and readier to integrate in a new environment... minors are better suited than adults... they have more energy. This is why they cost more and are better paid".

50 In order to entrap them even further, the *maman* often try to trigger with the subjugated women – especially if minors – falsely egalitarian behaviours retrieving historical legacies such as the "family cohabitation" between "slave owners" and "slaves". They act in a maternal and protective way with the only purpose to perpetuate the subjugation and the sexual exploitation.

humiliations the girls are subjected to during the journey and when they are forced into prostitution. In all this, the *maman* plays a very ambiguous and multi-faceted role; she gains control over the girls forcing them to act according to her only true desire, to become richer and richer.

The relationship between the *maman* and the girls is both protective and exploitative, made of allurements and violence, of comprehension and rejection. They are the typical features of a dependence system not counterbalanced by solidarity – and therefore strongly asymmetric – that the *maman*, and only the *maman*, uses according to her needs. The relationship is arbitrary: it is the *maman* that decides what kind of relationship the young victim must have with her, she is the one that decides how much money the young victim must bring her back each night or each week, she decides how the girl must dress and what she must say if the police or other exploiters of other adult or young women of other nationalities try to get in touch with her. The *maman* may choose a favourite girl among her lot (“since she is obedient, makes a great deal of money and therefore may keep watch on the other girls” - Int. No. 34) and let her rise within the group’s hierarchy, even if she is still totally subdued. It’s the *maman* that may seclude the girls for many days because they do not obey the orders blindly.

Other actors creating dependencies

Orders to the girls are given by the *maman* herself or by her collaborators, the so-called *maman-boy* (who may be her partner or husband) or factotum or the body-guard (the *black boy*) or the courier/escort (the *brother*, the trustworthy man who keeps the relationships with the country of origin⁵¹). If used in its plural form, i.e. *maman-boys*, the term indicates the cohabitation of all the mentioned figures or more figures cohabiting in the same persons. The factotum and the courier/mail man can be either a man (called at times *master* or boss) or a woman (*vice-maman*).

When in attendance, these actors play an important role in forcing the girls into full dependence and in coercing them into prostitution. They receive from the *maman* the explicit task and therefore “the minors must obey them just as if they were the *maman* herself” (Ints. No. 6 and 10). The influence that these persons have over the girls aims at developing a dual psychological conditioning: the *maman* may seem to be very attentive and send all sorts of soothing signals while the other actors may be sending violent and aggressive ones, or vice versa. The ultimate scope is the wearing down – by modifying the psyche – of the victims’ self-endurance, constantly mixing the different levels of the relationships.

The final goal is to force the victim – in different places and times - to choose among her executioners “the one she may trust” (Ints. No. 34 and 39) even if when Nigerian girls are

51 In the previous UNICRI survey the persons – mostly young – who escort the women during their journey are called “trolley” or “dago”. The victims very often use the word *brother* for defining these people when they tell their ordeal to the social operators, while the words “Madam’s boy” or “Madam’s black boys” - with their inner meaning – seem to hold steady. See: UNICRI, 2004, cit., p. 355.

involved, the choice always falls on the *maman* (ultimately an induced choice)⁵². The Nigerian girls submit to different kinds of relationships reflecting the features, the position and the role played by each actor (or couple of actors) within the organization. These people rotate around the *maman*, accept her leadership and her scopes; submitting to relationships structured on the principle of hierarchical solidarity, with the *maman* at the top and the girls at the bottom.

Box No. 1, is organized with the findings from the interviews (Int. No. 17, 39, 72, 79 and 81), describes the different actors belonging to the organization, with the *maman* at its core. Some of these figures are always adult males (husband/fiancé or body guard); others, such as the personal assistant, are almost always females while the driver/escort, the warden or the courier from/to Nigeria can be of both sexes.

If the *maman's* personal assistant and the girls' warden are women – which is generally the case - they often engage in prostitution (they are the so-called “favourites” - Int. No. 17 and 63). If these tasks are performed by young boys (who are exploited just as all the minors involved) they are “generally helped by grown men especially when they must use violent means for protecting the girls” (Int. No. 65). We must emphasize that the presence of minors exploiting other minors, empowered by the organisation and in the position of ordering/managing girls with their same age, is a new phenomenon in the Nigerian prostitution rings.

52 F. Sironi, quoting T. Nathan, states that torture utilizes four basic techniques for annihilating a person's personality: a) inversion, a process that subjugates the victim whereby she/he is thoroughly thrown off to the point that she/he does not know anymore what is right and what is wrong, what was logical becomes illogical and vice versa; b) the dual order, that constantly sends contrasting signals following the “good cop/ bad coop” model; c) redundancy, i.e. when the torturer constantly and obsessively performs acts that go against the victim's beliefs, and: d) the systematic shattering of the victim's cultural taboos. Sironi F., *Persecutori e vittime*, Milan: Feltrinelli 2001, pp. 36-37.

Box No. 1
Other actors that rotate around the *maman* creating dependencies.
Breakdown by gender and age

Actors	Adults	
	Male	Woman
Husband/boyfriend	x	-
Personal assistant	x	x
Body guard	x	-
Driver/ Escort to the working venues	x	x
Warden	x	x
Courier/escort from/to Nigeria	x	x

Source: Parsec, Ricerca ed Interventi sociali, 2009

It represents an important shift in the exploitation strategies and a new tactic used by the exploiters and the *maman* to defend themselves from the police. “It is a practice that we detected in the Romanian groups a few years ago”, says a key-informant (Int. No. 48) and that “we now find in the Nigerian groups as well. The use of young persons as wardens of the victims working in the street, helped by adults when violence is required for safeguarding the interests of the organization, is a new practice put in place by the *maman* but it is also a very old. Currently, it has only further developed and it is much more practiced⁵³”.

“To use minors in very important positions is almost compulsory for those organizations, such as those involved in violent exploitation of their victims in forced prostitution or drug pushing (...). They counterbalance the higher risk of being arrested with the use of young children who cannot be arrested. (...) It is a stratagem used by the adults for becoming invisible, for escaping and not being identified; it is a cowardly way of exploiting young people: to use minors who cannot be arrested for exploiting other minors”, says one interviewee (Int. No. 65).

The standard structure of an exploitation organization

The figures, as already mentioned, may vary in number according to its specific criminal structure⁵⁴ and according to the “social prestige” (Int. No. 16) that each *maman* and her

53 Ferraris V., *Dalla tratta al traffico, allo sfruttamento: i minori stranieri coinvolti nell'accattonaggio, nelle economie illegali e nella prostituzione* in Carchedi F., Orfano I., *La tratta di persone in Italia. Evoluzione del fenomeno e ambiti di sfruttamento*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007, p. 259 ff.

54 For the role played and the *modus operandi* of the Nigerian criminal organizations, see: UNICRI, 2004, cit., p. 363 ff.; Romani P., *Il ruolo della criminalità organizzata nel traffico di esseri umani*, in Carchedi F., *La prostituzione migrante e donne trafficate*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004, p. 129 ff.; Senato della Repubblica-

boys⁵⁵ enjoy within their world.

We must highlight that organizations that exploit minor women only were never found and, therefore, that organizations specialized in this specific sector are probably non-existent. However, under-age girls are a very important segment of the sex market, engaging in prostitution along with the adults, the former camouflaging the latter (Int. No. 70 and 71). The age of the groups of the sexually exploited varies and are somewhat organized according to an age-based hierarchy, with the older women holding some power in comparison with the younger ones.

The young victims are called upon to perform small services, such as lending clothes or other small goods (lipsticks, face powder, small money loans, etc.), play dumb about behaviours that the *maman* could interpret as hostile, keep secrets or support them when in need. The smallest structure is the one led by a *maman* exploiting one or more women, one of them being possibly a girl if the *maman* can count on the support of a husband or a fiancé. This organization made of two persons may exploit up to 3 women, one of whom may be under age. This is the typical structure and is the most representative one. The *partner* of the *maman*, although fully belonging to the criminal structure, may not be daily involved in the exploitation practices and, should this be the case, the *maman* is helped by a factotum.

The criminal structure becomes more complex when the stock of women rises to 4-6, with 1 or 2 that can be minors. In these cases we find the *maman* and her partner (husband or fiancé), flanked by the factotum and the body guard who often is also the driver and the escort/warden (in charge of keeping a close eye on the women while they are working and bringing them back home after their “shift” is over). The factotum, and at times the warden, may be minors (both male and female) while the other criminal figures are always adults. Such a structure is a full-fledged criminal organization⁵⁶. This structure can be defined as medium-size and can exploit (and control) up to 7-10 women, among whom many are girls. When this medium-size structure exploiting 4 to 6 women, increases its criminal potential by enrolling a driver, a warden or an escort on permanent basis, it can exploit up to 7 – 10 persons.

These last figures, the warden above all, have highly specialized competences since they must protect the victims, especially when young, from violent clients and from other criminal organizations⁵⁷. They may work upon call as the need arises and thus work for more

Camera dei Deputati, Comitato per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, cit. , 2009, p. 28.

55 For more information on the Nigerian organizations trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation and on the different kinds of *maman*, see: Carchedi F., *La prostituzione migrante e donne trafficate*, Milan: Franco Angeli, pp. 43 – 46; Monzini P., *Il mercato delle donne: prostituzione, tratta e sfruttamento*, Rome: Donzelli, 2002; Mascellini F., *La forza delle illusioni, dome migranti e donne trafficate*, Rome: Studi Emigrazione, 2006; Romani P., cit. , p. 129 ff.

56 See: Italian Penal Code, Art. No. 416 and supp. (“criminal association” and “Italian or foreign organized criminal association (mafia)”, in Tramontano L. (edited by), *Il Codice penale spiegato*, Piacenza: Casa Editrice La Tribuna, 2009, pp. 703 – 704.

57 Sometime these people belong to autonomous criminal gangs called “cultists” and offer their services to the *maman* for violently and aggressively solving conflicts that may arise among the victims themselves.

than one *maman* on a part-time basis, according to the women's working shift and in the different prostitution venues. Very often the warden is the link between different groups and thus belongs to and represents a criminal meta-structure⁵⁸. This is why the different exploitation structures form a network of criminal consortia.

When the warden works for only one organization which includes, over and above the criminal figures already mentioned, couriers from/to Nigeria (for transporting documents and money, in case the *money transfer* agencies are not used), the criminal structure may manage ten or more women. If this happens, the managing *maman* has reached very high specialization standards and her criminal charisma is rather high.

The features of the organizations are not the same throughout Italy, reflecting the situation in the different areas. For example, the organizations operating around Rome are less structured and sophisticated than those in Castel Volturno, Bari, Foggia, Venice and Mestre, Turin and Asti, where the *maman* is assisted by her partner, the factotum, the escort and the warden. Bigger organizations (made up by even more members) are scattered – although in limited number – throughout the Italy. The remaining organizations made up of at least three members, either working by themselves or in a consortium, are, as mentioned, to be considered as of organized crime groups as well.

In all of these cases, however, the dominant figures daily dealing with the women are almost always other women. The males keep a discreet profile, as a menacing and overwhelming figure, ready to use physical violence should the case arise. This presence fosters in the victims a feeling of fright making them ever more subjugated. This allows the *maman* to exchange or sell them with no over reaction from their part. This deep state of subjugation allows the *maman* to be rather mobile at the regional and national level (translational as well, in their relation to Nigeria above all) and makes them interchangeable so that they may easily manage their victims and those of their “colleagues”.

“The *maman* who exploit minors are never the same since they are afraid of the police (...). Thus, the *maman* form among them a sort of territorial cooperative, each one of them performing a specific task: one controls that everything is going smoothly, one organizes how to better exploit the girls and eventually their trade, one rents the *joint* (i.e. the stretch of the road where the girls will work), one takes care of the logistics, buying food, cloths, and shoes for all of them. The men directly look over the all process and the *maman* constantly keep them up to date” (Int. No. 81).

See: Piam (edited by), 2007, cit. , pp. 53 - 54. “Cultisti” belong to secret organizations following the same scopes and active in many Nigerian States, following the same rules and acting in solidarity between themselves. They have their own particular identification marks, are focused on the group's well-being and follow their charismatic chief who takes the most important decisions. They are active in many fields, not despising illegal acts. In order to meet their objectives they can terrorize their enemies and extol their aggressive behaviours (bullying included). Ukoha E. K., *Parent's involvement in the cult and their children's tendency to cultism*, p. 109, and Oladimeji B. Y., *Tackling cultism in our higher institutions through socio-psychological analysis: the Obafemi Awolowo University experience*, pp. 124 – 125, both in Awaritefe A. (edited by), 2009, cit.

58 La Rocca S., *Il reato di tratta delle persone nell'ordinamento giuridico italiano: dal Codice Rocco alla Legge n. 228 del 2003 sulla riduzione in schiavitù*, in Carchedi F., Tola V., cit. , pp. 332 – 333.

SEXUALLY EXPLOITED GIRLS:
SOME REPRESENTATIVE CASES



4.1 Foreword

This section of the Report is devoted to four cases related to 4 young victims hosted in shelters managed by the social services. The information was gathered partly by the social workers and partly by the research team. For each girl we report the country of origin and city of birth, the main personal data, the ways they were recruited and the ritual oath that followed the journey and the way the border was crossed⁵⁹. We also gathered information on how these girls were able to break free by themselves or with the help of others such as the police, friends, relatives or social workers. These stories illustrate and reinforce the previous sections of this report and offer a clear picture of relationship between the *maman* and her collaborators and between them and the victims (with some relatives in the background).

In these short stories we can detect, notwithstanding the young age of the victim, a rather strong sense of identity, especially if we consider the experience these girls went through. At the same time, we may detect a very high vulnerability which does not diminish, however, a strong feeling of personal dignity and an ongoing search for personal freedom. We also detected these girls' very high commitment towards their family, to the point that they are ready to accept everything, even to be totally subjected to the *maman*, in order not to vex it or hamper its economic well-being. The common factor of all these biographical short stories is the desire to leave the country of origin, to improve their' and their families' living conditions and the readiness to borrow money to this end.

This is the real catch for the *maman* and their criminal organizations: lending the money, have the victim swear that she will give it back at all costs and then force her to sell her body in order to do so, swindling her with the support of corrupted religious ministers. The two potential breakpoints are when the full amount has been paid back, i.e. the girl has paid in full, or when the girls grow up and finally refuse to be subjected to the *maman* and her collaborators. The Italian protection system coordinates the efforts of the Police and those of the community social services, picks up these signals, works with them until these girls are ready for a painless breakaway from the exploitation rings. The first contacts with the community services, the optional but not compulsory complaint filed against the exploiters and the entry into a shelter where these girls will gain back their lost autonomy, are the stages of their liberation.

The biographical approach for supplementing the statistical documentation and the interviews of the key-informants, makes room for personal histories, allowing person to speak with spontaneity and freedom. We chose this method of gathering data because it gave us the opportunity to better investigate the complex facets of migration and, within it, the worst cases of sexual exploitation as described by the victims.

59 For more detailed and adjoined information on the routes followed by the Nigerian traffickers/escorts see: Senato della Repubblica – Camera dei Deputati, Comitato per la Sicurezza della Repubblica, cit. , pp. 52 – 53.

4.2 First case – by G.A.

My name is G.A. I come from Benin City but grew up in the Delta State with my family. I was born in January 1992. The village chief had given my father a piece of land where he built his house. At 14 my father decided that I had to marry the Chief who, at the time, was 59 years old, had 5 wives and many children. I became his sixth wife. I lived in my husband's home for almost one year. I did not want to marry such an old guy but my father forced me to do so. Otherwise he would have lost his land and his house. At the beginning of 2007, I gave my husband a child and the situation became more and more difficult. I ran away from my husband's home after a few months but my father did not let me stay in his house because he was afraid of my husband's reaction.

For some time I lived in Benin City with my aunt and she took care of my baby. After my escape my husband hired ruffians who killed my father and burnt the house I had lived in with my family. Thank God he did not succeed. In Benin City I met B. who is my partner and with whom I decided to move to Italy. In Benin City, we met a friend of B., named F., living in Libya who, after having heard all our troubles, suggested that we escaped with him. In November 2007, we left the country and headed towards Libya. The trip was very tiring: sometimes we used a Jeep and sometimes we walked. In February 2008 F. helped B. to take residence in Tripoli and a job in a car cleaning venue. I worked in private homes as a cleaning lady but I did not like Libya. In March, we met a Nigerian boy that told us that he had a sister in Italy that could have helped me to find a job there. We agreed to pay him 45,000 euro for his help.

This boy's name was J. and he asked me to give him some of my things (pubic hairs, hair, a pair of underpants and some photos) that he had to send to a man he knew in Nigeria for "sanctifying" them with *woodoo* rites. He said that he was going to give me these things back before I left. This we did. In truth, I must say that after I felt better, I felt that the migrants' good spirits were protecting me. I left Tripoli in June 2008, with around 60 other people on a boat belonging to two Egyptian men. We spent 7 days at sea, before reaching Lampedusa where the Italian police intercepted us. The two Egyptians kept telling us not to give any name away. Once landed, the police took us in a reception center in Crotona. I called J's sister, D., from a telephone booth and she told me to go to Naples' central station where she was going to wait for me. But the police moved me from Crotona to Bari Palese. After one week they let me go after asking an Association in Bari to grant me a place to live. I did not know anybody in Bari and I had lost any contact with D. A group of guys from Senegal put me in touch with a Nigerian woman that they believed could have helped me. I went many times to see her and after a while, thinking of being kind to me, she told me that I could make money working as a prostitute. She said that she would give me the condoms, the creams and the make-up I needed and tell me exactly where to go if I gave her part of the money I would make. She even told me that – knowing that I was pregnant – that men like

pregnant women a lot and that I would have a lot of clients. I refused to become a prostitute and refused to have an abortion. But this woman was in touch with D. and forced me to go in the street. I managed to escape after a few weeks and went back to the boys from Senegal I had previously met. They helped me again and got me in touch with the social workers of a Reception Center in Bari. At the beginning of September I decided to accept their help even because I was pregnant (the baby was born in October 2008). My experience lasted approximately three weeks. My partner met me in Bari.

4.3 Second case – by O.O.

My name is O.O. and I was born in Benin City on September 26, 1992. I have 4 brothers and 4 sisters. My parents live in a rural village near Benin City. My father got sick and so my mother had to take care of the family all by herself. I helped my mother to sell the vegetables we grew in the garden. In March 2007 I was 15, a woman that often bought our vegetables asked me if I wanted to go to Italy. This woman whose name was F., was the mother of S., and a family friend. My mother was against the whole idea but I insisted so much that at last she gave up. F. told me that for organizing the journey, she wanted 45,000 Naria and that I had to sign a written commitment for its repayment.

We agreed for a loan of 45,000 Naira⁶⁰ that, once in Italy, became, according to her calculations 35,000 euro. Not knowing the exchange rate I thought it was a fair deal. Afterwards, the woman took me to a nearby village where a *baba-loa* sanctified the agreement according to the *voodoo* rites. She said that this was done in order to guarantee both parties: she was going to find me a good job and I would pay her back. On April 2008, I left by bus with V. and other girls and reached Kano and, from there, Sokoto in the North of Nigeria, at the border with Niger. Here, V. gave us forged passports and we had no problems when the Police controlled them. The following days we made it to Algeria and from there, crossing the Western border we arrived in Morocco. In Tangeri, V. asked us for an extra 1,500 euro for another guide that was to take us to Spain. This person gave me the telephone number of a Nigerian woman that lived in Turin. In Turin a Nigerian boy (the *brother*) was waiting for us, a collaborator of the woman we had called. We went to Palermo together where we gave the *brother* – before he left for Turin – the forged documents we had used for the trip. It was the end of June 2007.

C., the sister of F., the woman who had organized the journey from Nigeria, was waiting for us in Palermo. She was around 30 years old. She took us to a house that she had rented for us. After 3 days, C. brought us some very short and skimpy dresses. We asked her the reason for this and she answered by saying that we knew very well why. Right at that moment she told us that we had to sell ourselves on the streets. She menaced me and gave me a box of condoms. I could not flee because I did not know anyone and did not know the language. C. reminded me that I had to repay my loan and that the time had come for starting to pay back. She said that she only was the cashier of the *maman* that lived in Nigeria and that she

60 As of June 2009, 45,000 Naria correspond to approximately 270 euro while 4,500,000 Naria are approximately 27,000 euro. At the end of the game, by mixing up the amounts, by cheating on the exchange rates and adding some extra expenses, the *maman* easily arrives at 35/40,000 euro.

did not want trouble. We had to give her the 35,000 euro we agreed to before the journey; no further negotiations could take place. C. was constantly beating me up because I cried all the time and the clients did not want to be with a cry baby.

I gave her all the money I made. C. did not allow me to call my family in Nigeria for a very long time. I worked in the Parco della Favorita in Palermo for nine months. During the week I made about 70-80 euro per day and, sometimes up to 100. On Sundays, C. came to take all my money, approximately 600-700 euro. In mid July of 2008 the police stopped me for a check. I had no documents and therefore they took me to the Police Headquarters in Palermo and from there I was transferred to Rome. I was released and C. called me asking me to meet her in Milan, where her sister was living; C. had sold me to F., her sister. F. told me that she was my new *maman* and that from that time on I was supposed to pay her. She added that the money I had already given C. did not reduce my debt.

I worked very little and making very little money for a few months. C. was so mad at me that she asked three of her *boys* to bit me up, brutally. It was January 2009. At that moment I decided not to work anymore. I said “enough!” An Italian man I was seeing gave me the information about a Reception Centre in Florence. I got in touch with this Centre and after a few days I was hosted there. I spent one month in a place managed by the nuns and then I left for Rome where I was hosted in a community centre. I am still in Rome now (May 2009). My life in the street lasted approximately 10 months.

4.4 Third case – by F.B.

My name is F.B., I was born on October 8, 1991 and now (October 2008) I am 17 years old. I was born in Benin City near the University, where I grew up. My father name is N. and he is now 72; my mother is called N. and she is 55 years old. Mother is father’s third wife. My parents are retired but before the retirement they both worked for the postal service, but their salary was very small and they hardly managed to meet all the family expenses. My parents separated when I was 12 and I kept living with mother and my brothers. We were rather poor and my pregnancy only made things harder since my partner, S., was as poor as I was.

E., an acquaintance, suggested that I could emigrate without my mother knowing it because she would have been dead set against it. He told me that his sister who lived in Italy needed a baby-sitter. He said that she was ready to pay for my travels and that I could give her the money back by working for her. Once the debt had been paid I would be free to do what I wanted in Italy, he said. I agreed to the proposition and told my mother that I was going to visit my brothers in Lagos. So, I went with E. to meet a “minister” who took us to a river bank. Here a ceremony took place: the minister asked me to kneel down, lighted some candles and started praying to the water *loa* (called by the interviewed “*mami-water*”). Then he wet me with some of the river’s water that he had gathered in a big vase. I swore before the *loa* to always obey my *maman*, who was attending the ceremony.

On that occasion I left to the woman and to the “minister” some photographs of mine, a

sweater that I had brought with me and a small sachet made with the piece of the fabric of the dress I was wearing where they had told me to place a lock of my hair. It was the summer of 2005. The day after, I and another girls reached Cotonou in a car that M. was driving and we stayed with a woman who wanted to be called “*mami*”. After two weeks, pretending to be her daughters, we left with her and arrived in Paris by plane where we took a train to Venice-Mestre. It was August 26, 2005. At the station we met a Nigerian boy, J., with whom we took a taxi to Conegliano, at A.’s house, E.’s sister. With no compliments, A. told me that I was not to be a baby-sitter but a street prostitute. This is how I would pay her back and also be able to send some money at home. She also told me that I was not alone and I did not need to be scared since there were many other girls of my age ready to keep me company.

She also told me that I was to give her 10,000 every 10 days and that, at this rate; I would have repaid her in three years. I started working in the streets on September 15, 2005. I lived with H. and she took me to work with her. She taught me how to dress and how to strike a deal with the clients. A. started to be mad at me because she said I was not working enough. I was making around 700/800 euro per week. After a violent quarrel she told me that my debt had gone up to 80,000 euro. My inner self had started to reject this situation and A. had understood it.

Se was a violent person and beat me up frequently. Once I ended up in the hospital for her beatings. It was the fall of 2007. I stayed in the hospital for one day and did not tell anyone the truth. A. regularly called her sister E. in Benin City asking her to menace my mother and sister and so forcing me to do what she wanted. But these menaces were never followed by violent actions. After a while I understood that they were only menaces put in place in order to be able to continue to exploit me, for keeping me with her, in other words, just for scaring me. This contributed to rise my detachment from her and so I started not to go in the street⁶¹. She kept menacing me and I hated her more and more and then she would call my mother again to convince me to go back to work. I resisted and was not intimidated. Everything was getting to be unbearable; I wanted to end this brutal history.

In August 2008, I met a Nigerian woman that lived next door. We became friends and she told me that her cousin had to go through the same ordeal. She told me that her cousin had gotten in touch with a reception Centre that had helped her. I decided to follow the same path and went to the same Centre. A nun listened to my story. With my fiancé we went to Naples where a social worker was waiting for me. My family is not scared anymore and I feel much better. They tell everyone that I am in Canada. My experience in the streets lasted approximately three years.

61 For reference see also the document found by C. Donadel on the methods used by the *maman* for menacing the victim’s mother is very interesting. The document is a long letter recorded in a cassette that the *maman* sends to Benin City by courier. We can understand a lot by reading it. First, the *maman* acts very shyly and plaintively because the girl does not want to work anymore. Then she tries to blackmail her and, last, if she does not succeed she threatens her to report her to her male relatives in Nigeria. In this case the victim does not want to work anymore but the mother reacts positively to the *maman*’s requests. See: Bedin E., Donadel C., *La tratta a scopo di sfruttamento sessuale in strada e in ambienti al chiuso*, p. 120 ff., in Carchedi F., Orfano I., cit.

4.5 Fourth case – by M.M.

My name is M.M. and I was born on December 31, 1990 in Benin City. Next December I will be 18 (the interview took place at the end of October 2008). I entered Italy with a passport that was used by another person that arrived here before I did. The passport said I was 23 years old but in reality I was 17. My first stop was Turin and, then, Piacenza. It was February 2007 and it was very cold. My parents died about ten years ago, when I was 7. I was left alone with my two brothers. After my parents' death my two brothers and I moved to the house of some cousins that lived near us in Benin City. I was a hairdresser. In January 2007, while I was working, a customer, S., started to talk about Italy. She said that you could be successful as a hairdresser for the movie stars or that you could become a famous TV or movie actor. This woman used to come to the store every week and tipped all the young ones. After a few months she asked me if I wanted to go. I believed her lies and accepted.

We agreed on the terms of our agreement. She told me about the *voodoo* rites and the oath before my ancestors. I was not scared because *voodoo* is the religion of many Nigerians and even my parents followed it. I swore to pay the money back - 40,000 euro. I agreed without thinking and without knowing what that numbers were all about. S. told me that one of her acquaintances was going to meet me in Italy. After one week they took me to Lagos and after a long period – almost one month and one half – they took me to Togo where I stayed for another week. I left for Turin by plane, and there I met T., a woman that was waiting for me. She took me to her house in Piacenza where I was supposed to start my new job. Instead of the promised job T. told me that I had to sell myself to Italian men since that was the only way I would ever to be able to give back the money they lent me. I said that I would never do it and that I wanted to call S. because that was not what we had agreed upon. T. laughed and said that S. had sold me to her and that she was the one that I had to repay.

She started treating me very badly; she beat me up and did not give me food for days at a time. Once, she locked me in the house for three days in a row giving me only coffee, milk and a few cookies. With the help of her fiancé she tied me to the bed and beat me with a belt. T. kept telling me that I only had to be a prostitute for a few months and that once I had paid all the money back I was going to be free to do whatever I wanted. I lived this life for almost one full year and have no idea how much money I gave her. He was an Italian retired man and at times asked me to have sex with him, free of charge. I was tired and hopeless. I was sad but did not know how I could escape. In July 2008, I met a family that lived near the place where I worked.

They felt terribly sorry for me; they saw how young I was and started to talk to me and wave at me every time they saw me. I noticed that they came to talk to me on purpose and that they brought me good things to eat, mostly sweets and chocolates. After a few months they asked me if I was willing to work for them and take care of their old mother. I accepted and went to live with the old lady. In short, they helped me to escape. It was September. After a couple of weeks I was accepted in a Community House. As of now, I am waiting for my residence permit and I am following a social protection programme. My experience in the streets lasted approximately one year and one half.

4.6 A few remarks

The stories of girls recruited and destined to forced prostitution that we have presented here allow us to highlight a picture painted with deception, hoaxes and lies, with extortion and violence committed for the purpose of hindering any resistance to the exploitation system. Recruiting is only apparently accidental. A well dressed, elegant and charismatic woman sees a girl and studies her ways. She approaches her, she talks to her about emigrating and the success she could meet in Italy. She talks about Italy and tells her of her friends that went from a precarious and sad life to incredibly good living conditions. Or there are friends and acquaintances that listen to the wishes of young girls in distress, with old parents to care for or young children to raise, or alone without protection. They urge them to talk with the elegant lady that is well known and loved for all she does for others.

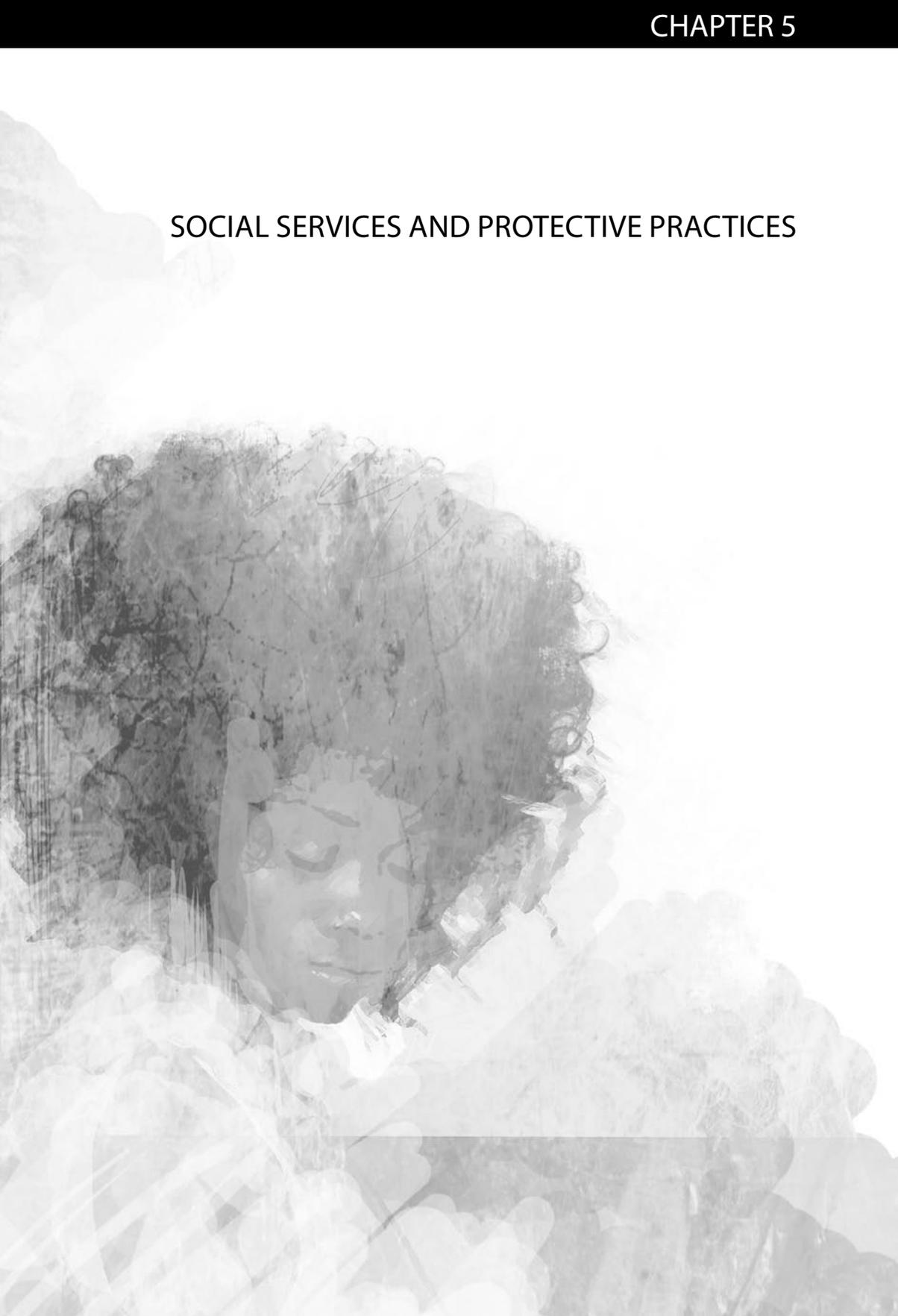
The lady is at the core of the recruiting process, the *maman*, as the friendly nickname goes, or just “mami” for F.B., is the pivot for every woman that wants to migrate, age notwithstanding. It is so much easier with young girls, they are easily swindled, and they trust everybody and are sure that all will go for the better. The money for organizing the journey is not a problem. The *maman* can easily find it. After all she seems to be and introduces herself as a success story of emigration. The documents arrive with the money. With money and documents at hand organizing the trip is a joke. The girls leave. As we may deduce from the stories, the journey takes different routes towards Morocco, Algeria, and Libya. The network that comes into being following the cities and towns described in the stories has a common transit point in Niger. From here the routes differ one from another. The escort usually is a Nigerian man, a *brother* that the girls may trust and that takes the girls to the chosen border. The *brother* knows where to stop, which cities to reach, which houses to rent, to whom to speak and to whom entrust the girls if he must go back; he knows the people that can accompany the victim for parts of the road. The stories tell us of a widely disseminated criminal network, an extremely efficient criminal chain that is to be found in all the cities included in the journey. These cities are chosen because it is there that the traffickers can count on a well organized system that allows the migrants to rest, to monitor the journey and to assess where to go, according to information gathered during the trip even though the routes are well tried and safe. The relations between the various articulations of the criminal gang are monetized and instrumental, an economic exchange for mutual services.

The economic transactions are many and multi-dimensional. All of them are to be paid by the victim who will eventually discover that she owes much more than she thought. Crossing European borders, in our case the Spanish, French and Italian ones, seems to be very easy. It becomes more difficult when the crossing is done by boat and the arrival is in Lampedusa, via Libya. The distribution of the Nigerian girls throughout Italy seems to be just as easy, regardless of whether they arrive by boat or plane. The ways the *maman* tell the girls what they are expected to do in order to pay their debt seems to be just as simple. Just as it seems to be straightforward to let the girls know the amount of money they must give back once they are in Italy.

Easily the *maman* put in place violent practices to force the girls to submit. The *maman* are businesswomen well connected to each others, and deal in human beings with the same attention they would give to any other commodity. It is her greed that marks the breaking point with the victims, even if they have to face the violence with which she tries to force her criminal rules on them. Some girls manage to break free more easily than others; some “split into two parts” and detach themselves in two stages: the first comes from the inside and the girl whose inner self progressively refuses the power of the *maman* but at the same time cannot free herself and is still a victim of her violence and abuse. The second stage comes when she really cannot take it any longer and she is ready to break free for good. It is then that she is psychologically ready to quit her life and she actively starts looking for help: social services, police force, individuals, Italian or not, that she feels she can trust.

What is significant in the cases presented here, being fully aware that they are success-stories, is that the network of social services is ample, as ample as the number of people who can recognize this kind of slavery and intervene. The relationship with the social services is not always an easy one although it is of extreme importance for the girls.

SOCIAL SERVICES AND PROTECTIVE PRACTICES



5.1 Street contacts and methods of detachment

On the street, in the sexual exploitation phase, Nigerian women are as old as they say they are. Since they have no documents (insofar as they have been seized by the *maman* and sent to their place of departure), it becomes almost impossible to establish their age with any precision. They declare the age that is suggested to them by the organization exploiting them. In order for social service providers and Police to understand whether or not they are dealing with a minor, they have to rely on their intuition, the feeling that they have on meeting them face to face. The attribution of minority to persons involved in prostitution is based on these observations and so it can only be hypothetical.

By comparing the perceptions of several social workers, “who once the potential minor has been identified go to observe her at close range” as stated by several interviewees (Int. No. 6, 10, 17, 18 and 61), probable minority can be reasonably established. It is a process that we might define as “reasoned perception” – according to the definition of the interviewee herself – being the result of the reflections of part of the team of social service providers working in the area. Other workers agree that, to use the words of one of them (Int. No. 68), when “possible minors are intercepted on the street, the police are informed, since such cases are a form of exploitation akin to slavery”. But when the joint action of social service providers and the Police achieves the objective of contacting the young victim, the parties begin a process of mutual approach/recognition. The final result of these contacts, however, is not always as immediate or positive as the social service and judicial workers would like.

In fact, identifying a minor and sharing that identification with the rest of the team and with police units working in the area does not eliminate the possibility that she will refuse to separate immediately from her exploiter, continuing to recognize her power of interdiction, and so failing to repudiate her and refusing to denounce her to the police. A common defence strategy, if the minor does not want to break up from the *maman* is denial of her minority status and refusal to reveal the name of the *maman* and her accomplices. One of the interviewees states, “if they don’t want to get out of the racket... or if for some reason they can’t, they declare an age over 18, because if they declared their minority in the presence of Police officers they would immediately be registered by the Police or become the object of a protective action. The *maman* are careful to give them a thorough indoctrination on this point.” (Int. No. 6).

If, on the contrary, the minor accepts, and in substance admits she is a minor and in need of help, the process of verification/validation of her declared age begins. In the first case, the binding force of the organization remains well-nigh intact, while in the second case the strength of the bond has been reduced or even broken. In any case, minors who, despite being intercepted, do not intend to detach themselves from the *maman*, have experienced their first contact with community-based services and have learned that there is a possibility to free themselves from the exploitation. Resistance in such cases is rooted in their inability to break away from the relationship of (economic, moral, and psychological) subjugation.

The forces for liberation, moreover, may be totally unknown – or known only partially and insufficiently – and therefore unable to be evaluated by the victim. She may understand,

however – and this may be at the basis of her refusal to accept the offer of help – that an immediate and unprepared detachment might prove to be illusory and counter-productive, even for the other members of her family. Anyway, when the minor intends to free herself from subjugation she wears – as Sennett⁶² would say – a “mask”, thus opening the way to a behavioural (and psychological) splitting off “of the obedient external figure” (that continues in our case to be sexually exploited) and an “internal observer” (who continues, however, to induce passive behaviour until conditions for the final detachment have matured). “The external self plays a role,” says Sennett, “while the internal self, on the other hand, refuses to believe everything that the external self keeps on doing.” These behaviours are ploys and strategies of resistance in order to gradually withdraw from the psychological-existential net in which she has been snared, but without declaring open war on the *maman* and her organization.

The acquisition of more and more autonomy, therefore, by continuing to behave as requested in a dependent way while rebelling, for a certain period only internally, in order to get out from under from the subjugating influence, becomes a strategy for survival in a context of subjugation. Nevertheless, the situation remains one of a strong and strident emotional-existential crisis with traumatic connotations which the minors try to contain as best they can. “The crisis situation”, says one interviewee, “is brought about by the degrading conditions (both the location – often a desolate, semi-urbanized periphery, and the exasperated surveillance and control exercised by overseer/controllers and girlfriend/spies of the *maman* who report the victim’s complaints and opinions) in which the minors are coercively induced to prostitute themselves” (Int. No. 1).

Minors are persons still in the phase of “psychological and identity reinforcement and so their suffering is intensified by their special stage of life. The crises are not always disruptive and persuading these people to make a break with the racket is possible only through particularly complex interventions that only expert social workers can carry off” (Int. No. 34). The crisis, at any rate, produces in the victim a radical self-reflection about what she is engaged in and about her place in the experience that she is living, as well as on the destination of the economic fruits produced by her condition. The crisis – carried to its extreme consequences – is accompanied almost necessarily by a request for care in the form of an intervention that can create a new equilibrium from the traumas that have been suffered. Thus begins the search, on the part of the young victims, for a way out and the *de facto* acquisition of a different perspective from which to look around and interpret in the right light the social work that is performed on the street by community-based social services.

5.2 Initial reception and the status of the victim

“Anyway it’s not easy at the beginning of our relationship – says one social worker – to communicate with the Nigerian women and especially if they are minors. On the one hand, there’s the fear, and on the other, the initial distrust and the suspicious behaviour that they externalize in the way they relate to social service workers.” (Int. No. 8) “Generally, they are

62 Sennett R., *Authority*, cit., pp. 117 – 119 and 121-123.

very frightened,” says another interviewee (Int. No. 24), “in that they call to mind all of the rituals that accompanied their taking the oath and the promise to pay back the contracted debt.” “Yes, they’re afraid... for themselves and also for their parents”, says another social services worker (Int. No. 17).

“They’ve figured out the *maman*’s game – she continues – and so they accuse her of having betrayed and deceived them with the promise of legitimate work... the non-existent work... and the beating they were given to force them to prostitute themselves. But they are afraid of what might happen to their parents. The *maman* threatens them with sending her *boys* to Benin City or telephoning the *boys* of the same gang who live in Nigeria to go after their parents, their sister, or their little brother (of whom the gangs also have photos). How to get out of this stalemate?” “In part it’s not possible. The Nigerian woman has to pay off her debt, whether she’s an adult or a minor”, says one social service worker. “That’s why fleeing from the service – particularly when our conversations have only just begun – is the only possibility they can see... and which they often put into action even though they’re still afraid” (Int. No. 24). But the ones that escape are not many since in the majority of the cases they do accept the help but do not denounce the *maman*. “It is like a conditional surrender. The girl says: I exit the prostitution ring, I do not denounce you and you do not touch my parents or my relatives” (Int. No. 16).

In this particular phase the relationship with the service provider is problematic, especially in the phase defined as the initial reception. “Can the service and the Police prevent the violence that could be committed against my parents?” “The youngest ones ask themselves this question and they repeat it to us as a pre-condition for joining the protection program, states one worker” (Int. No. 17). The answers offered by the workers are varied and aimed mainly at calming the minors “with an eye toward limiting the damage”, as some of them affirm (Int. No. 38, 73 and 76). In these cases the only thing we can do is calm the victims, even at the cost of distorting reality a little. The aim is purely therapeutic.”

The main responses acquired from the interviews are: “If necessary we can notify our (Italian) police since they’re in contact with the police in your city (Benin City) and so you can rest easy” (Int. No. 17). “The *maman* betrayed you, she forced you into prostitution. She’s not going to hurt your parents because traitors don’t have the force to do more harm” (Int. No. 4). “The oath you took to pay back the debt contracted by your family has been annulled because the *maman* didn’t find you a job like she promised. She lied, and she doesn’t deserve your respect any more” (Int. No. 71). The technique used is to recall the entire process of exploitation and bring out – with regard to each single stage – the “betrayals” and the “lies” of the *maman*, her “unfulfilled promises” and the “use of violence that she herself put into play even though it was completely unjustified” (Int. No. 16) One psychologist, reporting her experience in synthesis, states that the methodological approach which allowed her to make the most progress in dealing with Nigerian minors was the “analysis of the script”⁶³, the script being the *standard* model of exploitation to which the minors often refer when they begin their stories of what happened them.

63 The interviewed psychologist is referring to the “analysis of the script” proposed by Eric Berne. See: Berne E., cit.

“They recount what happened”, according to this interviewee (Int. No. 34), “in a very synthetic way, mentioning just a few facts in a very standard way. From what they say, you can logically understand the plan of their story, that is, the acting out of the script. The script is to be taken seriously, it must be analysed with them and verified in order to understand, slowly but surely, if the events they recount actually happened. You have to separate the real events from the ones that were copied or learned in the discussions of the group subjected to exploitation by the same *maman*. And understand the details that the beneficiary inserts into her specific script, the ones that differ from the standard one. But to do this you need time and a lot of patience, but then you can see the results.”

One important result is when the minors who become beneficiaries of the service manage to progressively overcome their fear for their parents thus reinforcing their own resolve. “In many cases, - states another interviewee - (Int. No. 6 and 70) – the fear for what might happen to their parents is only a virtual fear, in the sense that the *maman* really don’t have the power and above all the desire to create more trouble for themselves.” Often the minors overestimate the power of the *maman* and so they appear to be capable of extraordinary things. “Progressively reducing and breaking/splintering this image is part of the social and therapeutic work that is activated during the protection program” recalls the same interviewee. “It’s the work that we can define as «de-woodooization»” affirms another (Int. No. 6).

5.3 Residential intervention. Cohabitation and communal relationships

In the intervening phase between the initial reception and the phase leading up to the second reception in a residential setting – the phase in which the minors have come to understand the nature of the social protection being offered and participate in the drafting of their protective program – there is a fairly high drop-out rate. In addition to the dissuasive factors described above, there is also the negative effect of the explanation given to the minors that once they enter the social protection program they will no longer have any income. The shelter provides them with food and clothing but does not give out money (in some cases a weekly “allowance” is provided).

“This is a very delicate phase - explains one interviewee (Int. No. 54) - when the minor begins to compare the life she led with the *maman*, and with her friends and fellow victims of exploitation, and the life she will have without her and them, especially with regard to aspects of daily living, the security inherent in living in a group of other Nigerians, the friendships formed within the group with the older women, and especially the money they were able to send back home when something was left after making the weekly payment on their debt.” The weighing – and then the choice – between these two boxes also depends on the intensity of the suffering undergone by the minor and her capacity to cut off (socio-psychological) from relationships with people who have inflicted her violence and especially with her “internal torturer”⁶⁴

Several of the interviewed social workers stated that, once the minors chose to follow the

64 Sironi F., 2001, cit., pp. 43 and 46.

protective program, their conduct in the group home became exemplary, although there are some exceptions. These latter are not generally indicative of the Nigerian target group but are circumscribed to specific cases of particularly traumatized and fragile minors whose disorders tend to manifest themselves more frequently. Their disorders are acted out in words and expressions that tend to emphasize sensations which the minors claim to experience through the use of symbolic language.

Among the phrases recorded by interviewees who work as counsellor/therapists in the shelters, the most common are: “I’ve got a snake in my head,” “There’s a snake in my belly,” (Int. No. 6), “I can feel the water in my head,” (Int. No. 78), “Cool my head,” “I’m possessed,” (Int. No. 71), “Last night there were ants coming out of my feet” (Int. No. 9), “The other night I went to Benin City and I came back this morning”, “I hear voices that tell me to go back home because my parents are in danger”, “I want to go to sleep and never wake up again” (Int. No. 64), “Break my head open to get out the poison they made me swallow” (Int. No. 10). These expressions are correlated to the magical/religious symbolism of voodoo, of which the social workers seem to be generally well aware.

In any event, these metaphorical expressions represent the different emotional states of the beneficiaries and their psychological conditions: on the one hand, they express – to use the words of Faldini Pizzorno – positive existential conditions oriented toward practices that are self-curative and therapeutic (tied to the religious dictates of *woodoo*), and on the other to negative or aggressive existential conditions (tied to the magical dictates and witchcraft of *woodoo*)⁶⁵. In these latter cases it is not rare to encounter Nigerian victims of trafficking who express themselves in this way because of past traumas and ongoing suffering even after enrolling in the protective services.

On the contrary, the self-curative and therapeutic phrases, according to some interviewees, “are pronounced by beneficiaries to lighten the burden of their painful condition” (Int. No. 71)⁶⁶ or, “for astonishing the operators with resounding and mysterious words” (Int. No. 70) and, at last, as an operator says (Int. No. 17), “In order to establish a privileged relation-

65 The author is nevertheless of the opinion that the “watershed between what we can consider positive and negative is very labile.” In general “in the realm of *voodoo* everything that goes against the religion and against the *loa* is negative (the gods of the *woodoo* pantheon) and in the social realm everything that goes against the laws of the state, against the family, and against the common ways of relating dictated by traditional customs. It follows, from this perspective, that magic too, if directed in conformity with these community rules takes on a positive connotation”, see Faldini Pizzorno L., *Il Vodou*, Milan: Xenia, 1999, pp. 65-66. In such a context even the *woodoo* oath which is the seal of approval of the choice to emigrate is not negative in itself, it becomes such if the oath-giver and the *maman* orient the ritual toward the subjugation of the oath-taker; giving, that is, in this way a negative connotation to the oath.

66 The interviewee, a physician in Castel Volturno, usually says to those who express themselves in this way, very few actually, that he too “has a snake in his head” and he too “would like to fly over Naples” or “have ants between his fingers,” etc. The doctor says, “when service users, especially the younger ones, because they’re more susceptible, always tell me they have small animals in their stomach, I tell them that my Italian patients have them too but they don’t say it; or when they say they ‘have a snake in my head’ I respond: tell him to come out and we’ll examine him too” or I respond, “let me touch him so I can take his temperature. It might sound simplistic but I get the desired result. After a few visits some of them don’t say things like that anymore and they seem more relaxed, not least because we never express any judgements and we express ourselves in a way that always respects their way of being” (Int. No. 71).

ship with some operators on a magical and esoteric basis”. “It’s their way of testing us - says another interviewee (Int. No. 10) - to see how we react and gauge our capacity to follow them in their way of putting things. It’s almost as though they’re daring us to understand them because their cultural-symbolic universe is also tied to the oath they took in front of their *native-doctor* or *baba-low* and this is their way of putting him on a lower level and not being afraid of him anymore” says another (Int. No. 4). Sometimes this can create tensions with other groups of beneficiaries, because they tend to make fun of beneficiaries who say things like that⁶⁷.

“These are easily controlled aspects of community life”, says still another interviewee (Int. No. 17) “but it is important to have access to an expert supervisor who is able to interpret the symbolism and reassure the social service staff, especially the younger ones, even though the introduction of young staff members to direct contact with beneficiaries is done gradually and they therefore have time to adjust to the life and dynamics of the group home.” Important support comes from by linguistic-cultural mediators of Nigerian origin, with whom the exchange with beneficiaries proceeds smoothly even on the symbolic level. Especially when the younger beneficiaries do not speak much Italian they have a harder time getting oriented in the local community. But not all services have access to these professional figures and so the service providers themselves may have problems with intercultural⁶⁸ or symbolic-religious⁶⁹ communication.

67 In this regard see also Beneduce R., *Riti woodoo fra dimensione religiosa di dominio e progetti di individualizzazione*, in *Sessualità. Corpi fuori luogo. Cultura, Il sociale del fare e pensare*, n.2, 2003, p. 51 ff.

68 For a specialist’s view of this issue, see Mezzetti M., *Il dialogo interculturale. Manuale per operatori sanitari e altre professioni di aiuto*, Rome: Carocci Faber, 2003; Mucchi Faina A., *Comunicazione interculturale. Il punto di vista psicologico-sociale*, Rome - Bari: Editori Laterza, 2006; Castiglione I., *La comunicazione interculturale: competenza e pratiche*, Rome: Carocci, 2005; and finally, Santipolo M., Tosini M., Tucciarone S., *La comunicazione interculturale in ambito socio-sanitario*, Venice: Editrice Ca’ Foscarina, 2004.

69 As “religious mediators” few services take advantage of nuns, priests (Nigerian nationals, whenever available) or Protestant ministers who may better communicate with the victims and may have a therapeutic and anti-stress effect on them. See: Demetrio D., *Manuale di educazione degli adulti*, Chapter 3, Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2003, pp. 67 – 85.

SOCIAL PROTECTION SERVICES.
CASE STUDIES



6.1 Foreword

Following are case-studies from three social services with Nigerian underage beneficiaries. The three social services have been chosen as case studies because they couple know-how with a long experience in the field. In this report we focus only on their engagement with Nigerian girls, being fully aware that it is only one facet of the work that these three structures carry on with Nigerian women of all ages and other national groups. The three services under examination do not and cannot provide services for only one target group since in Italy specialized social services of this kind do not exist. The three social services we highlight in this report serve beneficiaries coming from different countries but over time have found themselves serving mainly Nigerian nationals.

The engagement with Nigerian beneficiaries of social services in Novara and Castel Volturno is ascribable to their service area in which the Nigerian component, minors included, is the majority. The case of Venice differs from the previous two since in the areas around that city, in nearby Mestre and in the neighbouring towns, street or close-doors forced prostitution involves higher numbers of women coming from other national groups, although Nigerians are highly represented. The high number of minors forced into prostitution among the Nigerian and Romanian groups calls for special attention, care and skills over and above those required for taking care of all victims of trafficking, adults or minors.

Over time, these services have become points of reference for these girls and, therefore, they have developed specialized knowledge and skills. The three case studies include a brief description of the agency's geographical service area the agency's main organizational features, the characteristics of the young Nigerians they serve, the services/activities they offer and how these activities/services affect the girls. Last, we highlight the weak points we found and the training needs as expressed by the social service workers themselves⁷⁰.

6.2 The service "Città e Prostituzione, Venice-Mestre"⁷¹

Geographical context and Nigerian prostitution

Nigerian women and girls are an important segment of the prostitution rings in the Municipality of Venice where they have been active for over 10 years. "The work places are always the same", says a woman we interviewed. "The area around the central train station of Mestre, the Piave neighbourhood, the street that goes to Mogliano Veneto and Preganziol,

70 For the micro-survey we used the analytical scheme proposed by Yin R. K., *Case Study Research: Design and Method*, London: Sage Publications, 2002, Chapter 4. That is: the documentation coming from the service, the activity reports, the interviews and the discussions with the managers and the staff and the direct observation.

71 The Case Study is based on interviews with the head of the service, C. Donadel, the psychologist E. Bedin and the coordinator C. Bragnolo. Materials produced by the service were also utilised.

the other municipalities around Mestre” (Int. No. 17). Over time, the Nigerian group, adults and minors alike, underwent certain slow but continuous modifications especially in the main features of the trafficked persons, although some important structural elements are constant. “Two factors have never changed, regardless of age: Nigerian forced prostitution is for the most part practised in the streets and even if there are some male prostitutes, it is basically a women’s issue.” (*ibid.*)

“We can refer to the ‘feminization of exploitation’, with the *maman* and her “favourites” that exploit other girls and at the same time are exploited at its core. Subjugation mostly is an issue for the younger ones, for those under age. The debt and the magic of *woodoo* entailing the subjugation to the “spirits” that checks to see that the money is paid back are two constant features.” (*ibid.*) What has changed, and lowered, is the age of the girls whose percentage fluctuates from a 12 – 15% with, at any given time, peaks that may reach 18% of the 500-600 Nigerian women estimated in the Province of Mestre. The social service annual reports, i.e. the official data and not the estimated figures, show that from the beginning of 2007 to April 2009 the service contacted 243 Nigerians, 35/40 of them being under age, i.e. 15% of the total (the is partly the age perceived by the social service workers, partly the age declared by the girls and, finally, the age as shown by anthropometric tests.

Table No. 7 shows a rise in initial and second contacts, mostly street contacts when the information is passed out during the past year (2008). We find the same rise in the number of meetings that took place in agency offices, where, following the dictates of Art. 18 of Law 286-98, social protection programmes are drafted. The data of the first 4 months show a similar increase for 2009. According to figures related to 2008 – April 2009, the Nigerian women account for 12-15% of the overall total, against the estimated 5-7% of past years, thus being a constant and ever rising component working in the area.

Table No. 7
Nigerian nationals, minors included, served by the agency.
Breakdown per year and service received

Year	Service received				
	Counselling	Interviews	Protective Services	Total	Minors
2007	41	22	7	70	8
2008	73	34	22	129	31
2009 (April)	28	8	8	44	6
Total	142	64	37	243	45

Source: our elaboration of data collected by the agency “Città e prostituzione”, 2009

To respond adequately to this demand, the agency decided to hire on a permanent basis one Nigerian cultural-linguistic mediator for each of its three departments. Actually the Nigerian group, minors and adults alike, is a structural component of the agency’s activities although the growth in the number of under-age girls has forced it to diversify its activities. The girls, just as the older women, seem to arrive at the service fully aware of the possibili-

ties they have to exit the prostitution rings. An interviewee says “The minors are fully aware of the different models of social intervention and protection put in place for supporting the victims of trafficking. (...) They know how to reach the services or how to make themselves visible, and therefore how to be contacted by the Mobile Unit, when they decide to get rid of the *maman*” (Int. No. 18).

The main features of the minors served by the agency

The young Nigerian victims that the service intercepted were, as already mentioned, approximately 40 but only 10 were actually taken under its care. The data collected by the agency show that in the last three years 8 out of the 10 girls served by the agency were 17 years old while two were younger, i.e. 15. Six of these girls have been placed in residential shelters belonging to the regional network. “These girls came from what the Nigerians refer to as the “south-south” of the country, Edo State.” And “these girls come from big and very poor families. They emigrate expecting to improve theirs and their family living conditions.” (*ibid.*)

The structural change of the phenomenon prevalently relates to the ways the girls are recruited and to their migratory journey. “Young girls are now being recruited much more than used to be the case. We now find girls less than 17 years of age or just over 18 working in the streets. But we also find 16-year old or slightly younger” (Int. No. 16). The presence of under-age girls, between 16 and 18 years old, and of girls of 18-20 goes hand in hand with the increase in the official numbers registered by the Police following disembarkations from Libya. Young age makes it more difficult for the social service workers to “hook up” with these girls since not always they are able to establish a contact with them.

At the time of their arrival they do not speak Italian and very often their English is very poor, which makes us hypothesize very poor schooling. “There are plenty of difficulties when dealing with a minor because many local government agencies and departments must come into play. The department for youth services, for example, which does not always coincide with “Città e Prostituzione” since their being minors means we cannot speak of prostitution as such but always of trafficking and exploitation. The Juvenile Court and foster care guardians come into play as well” (Int. No. 18). “There are many problems we must deal with basically because these girls are adolescents going through a very difficult stage of life, they are highly vulnerable and our social workers do not always have enough experience in working with the very young” (Int. No. 17).

The ratio of girls intercepted on the street, therefore considered minors by the operators, to those actually served by the agency is around one to four or five (10 over 40). This ratio tells us how difficult it is to reach these girls. “Young girls, in spite of their age, do not easily respond to the signals of help that the social service workers or the Police Force send them. On the one hand, the magical and religious rites influence them more, on the other, they are stubbornly determined to meet the family’s expectations, to support it.” (*ibid.*) Another element differentiating the experience of these girls from that of those that were trafficked in the past is the way the journey is decided and organized.

One of the women interviewed makes a point in saying, “these girls coped with a very long and difficult journey to get to Libya. (...) Once there they were sold or forced to prostitute in makeshift or better brothels in Tripoli or Misurata. They let them leave after a few months, when they had made enough money to pay for the last part of their trip. They boarded a boat that took them to Lampedusa, following the same path of the asylum seekers. We are talking about “initiation” trips, they are abused and exploited way before arriving in Lampedusa. When they finally get there they have already been broken down and have no strength to react. We think they are strong but in reality they are already defeated. When they finally arrive at their destination, after months of fatigue and abuse, they are sent immediately to the streets” (Int. No. 17). The service usually intercepts them at the very start of their exploitation: it is just as simple to get in touch with them as it is hard to convince them to join a social protection programme.

The service structure

“Città e Prostituzione” seeks to give positive responses to the multiple problems faces by trafficked Nigerian girls. The intervention is set within the well-tested *zoning*⁷² methodology, based on convincing people working as prostitutes or that are forced to prostitute themselves to work in areas with a low urbanization in order to avoid conflicts with the residents. The core of this work is to build territorial networks that are capable of enhancing the resources of a city. This approach is used for the girls who “by definition (according to current law) do not engage in prostitution willingly” (Int. No. 18).

The Juvenile Department of the Municipality of Venice has delegated all matters related to the provision of services to minors to “Città e Prostituzione”, including the procedures to be followed for the Juvenile Courts and for foster custody in the care of community services. One of the persons interviewed says, “this is to say that all foreign girls between 16 and 18 years of age, all victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, must go through us”. People under 16 are the only exception since the Juvenile Department of the Municipality of Venice is in charge of providing for this group. At present (spring 2009) the service has a staff made up by a general coordinator, managing and supervising all the activities that are carried out by the three departments and who maintains contacts with local and national institutions, and by three coordinators, one for each department.

The departments are: the toll-free number that delivers the first information and takes care of the first calls received by the 14 anti-trafficking offices scattered throughout Italy; the mobile units of the *Free Woman Project* and social protection residential services. The three departments are interconnected and staff include counsellors, social and community workers, 4 linguistic-cultural mediators (one being a Nigerian woman for facilitating contacts with this group). The mobile units inform and monitor the presence in the streets and therefore to intercept the minors in the already mentioned areas where the Nigerians work.

72 See: Carchedi F., Tola V., Stridbeck U., *Lo zoning possibile. Governance della prostituzione e della tratta delle donne. Il caso di Venezia, Stoccolma e Amsterdam*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007, p. 33 ff.

First contacts and social protection plans

“Città e Prostituzione” is part of a regional network made of 8 help centres and 2 safe homes located in the Municipality of Venice/Mestre. The city has two more safe houses (managed under contract with the Municipality) in charge of the Individualised Care Programmes (PAI). The Municipality of Venice, as main agency, monitors and assesses the different cases that are served directly by community social service agencies through its Crisis and Evaluation Unit, which links up the Police Force, the Juvenile Office and the Commission on Art. 18. The Municipality is also responsible for networking all the social workers.

The Nigerian girls arrive in a very vulnerable psychological condition and often in a confused state. “A vulnerability that can be immediately detected, from the first interviews” (Int. No. 17). The social service workers immediately understand the victim’s young age even if, “they try to conceal their real age; as the *maman* told them their real age should never be revealed”. (*ibid.*) Very young victims do not understand immediately that their age is an asset. These very young victims do not see their age as a factor playing a positive role for their protection and very often they give the social service workers false information, telling them that they are older than they actually are, thus delaying the intervention.

This is the stage when the girls are mostly concerned about their legal status and the underlining possibility of entering the labour market and therefore paying what is left of their debt and/or obeying the family’s requests. Problems arise because, “it is difficult to conceive a long-term individual plan for the young Nigerian girls. It is generally hard for them to follow the different stages into which the plan is divided. Job placement becomes very difficult because they didn’t have a clear idea of what they wanted to do before they migrated and, for sure, the tough experiences they went through in Italy does not help them at all” (Int. No. 17).

6.3 The project “Liberazione e speranza”, Novara⁷³

Geographical context and Nigerian prostitution

In the last ten years trafficked people forced into prostitution that used to work around Turin have moved to Novara and its surroundings. The flow started as a trickle, becoming more and more evident in the years between the first and second half of this decade. Nigerians, women and girls, are the majority. The Province of Novara has reacted by promoting a social protection service, networking with third sector associations.

According to reports describing the service’s activities, there has been a decrease in the

73 The Case Study is based on interviews with the head of the service, A. Levra, the social worker P. Brovelli and the educator L. Gallio. We also interviewed C.V. Caroamore, Public Prosecutor of Novara and V. Iadevaia, Head of the Flying Squad. Materials produced by the service were also utilised.

amount of street prostitution, starting in the spring of 2006. There are two reasons for the decline: a) the decrease of the Romanian component, ascribable to the country's entry into the European Union and the subsequent freedom of movement that made the protection programmes less interesting as a means to acquisition of a residence permit; b) foreign women, but not Nigerians, are now forced to work in apartments. As a result, the 50-60 women that joined the protection programme from 2006 are now (April 2009) down to 40-50. This has made the Nigerian presence even more visible. The data collected by the Flying Squad of Novara and by a local public persecutor tell us that at present about 100 non-Nigerian women are working behind closed doors (Int. No. 15 and 14).

Most of the women served by the agency and following social protection programmes (under the provisions of Art. 18) are Nigerian nationals: 9 out of 10 in 2008. The public persecutor says that, "there are not too many minors but the Nigerians are well represented." (*ibid.*) since, as another person says, "minors here are not considered to be of high economic value since the beneficiaries do not want to run the risk of being caught and have troubles with the law" (Int. No. 15). The general feeling is that there are few girls younger than 18 in the streets, the average being 18-19 up to around 22.

The main features of the minors served by the agency

Since 2000, the agency provided for around 400 people, a little more than one half of them Nigerian nationals. The minors account for about 20 of the women, i.e. almost 10% of the total. In general, these women and girls come from Edo State, from its capital Benin City or from the nearby villages. Recent years have seen a rise in the number of women coming from the most economically deprived areas, especially the rural villages where even basic services, as water and electricity are missing. "These girls are recruited where they live, in the villages or at the market where they help their mothers, their sisters or aunts to sell their produce. It is here that the *maman* meets them in the first place and it's here that she starts to court them, convincing them to migrate with the false promise of a good job" (Int. No. 12).

The social service workers feel that the family of origin is at least partly aware of the dangers the girl might meet by migrating and contracting a debt. At times it is difficult to communicate with the family even after the girl has signed on to a protection plan: the family may oppose the girl's efforts to free herself since it is under economic stress and relies on her for its economic well-being.

Girls and women who have crossed the desert to Libya tell tales of violence, rape and related pregnancies. In general, Tripoli is where the exploitation starts. "We did provide services to some of these girls but they ask for asylum-seeker status as a way of leaving our protected homes" (Int. No. 13). Little do they realize that the *maman* and her *boys* are ready for them just around the corner.

The use of more brutal forms of sexual violence marks the difference between the women and the girls that must be convinced to sell themselves. The majority of the girls served by

the agency have a very low degree of schooling and, at times, are almost illiterate. For this reason, very often they cannot read the documents, expulsion notice included. They even have problems remembering the places and the names of the streets where they were forced to work, making it harder to report against their jailers.

The agency structure

The structure, founded in 2000, is financed by the Province of Novara and the Department for Equal Opportunities. The association has an office in the city centre which is open on week-days and where all services are managed. The staff is made up of the president, two counsellors, a social worker and a linguistic-cultural mediator of Nigerian origin, essential for ensuring a correct relationship with the main segment of the women that refer to the service, i.e. Nigerian nationals. The association cooperates with other structures, in particular with a safe house and a residence for women in distress.

Thanks to the fact that most of the women served by the agency are of Nigerian origin, the staff was able to specialise and is now able to offer targeted services, taking into due account the specific features of trafficking and sexual exploitation characterising this group. “We have a long experience working with the Nigerian group. (...) We strongly felt the need to specialise and we made virtue out of need. Many mistakes can be made with the Nigerian girls. It is important to assess them so that we do not make the same mistakes with the other girls. The supervision of an expert and the action of the cultural mediator are at the core of our interventions. They are two essential persons that help us limit the number of mistakes we make”, says one counsellor (Int. No. 12).

Initial contacts and social protection plans

The minors get in touch with the service and are served in the same ways as other victims. The preparation of the individualised plan is made with the active participation of the girl and is stipulated by the girl and the service. The counsellor, the cultural mediator and the workers of the Novara social services (or of the other towns where the girl is intercepted) meet periodically to assess and monitor the plan. Many months are needed before the girl feels that she can trust the people that are there to help her.

Very often they declare a different name and an age older than their real one, afraid of being sent out of the country because of their young age, another routine lie of their *maman*. “We need weeks, at times months, to get to know the whole story: migration, exploitation, slavery. Once this is finally completed they may even decide to file a complaint. We need 10 or 15 interviews before we have a clear picture. They file a complaint to the Police only when they feel good about what they have done and they finally feel safe with us”, says a woman (Int. No. 13).

Many psychological problems and difficulties of finding a regular job, once the plan has been completed, are the main needs to face. The collaboration with the ethno-psychiatrists

from the Centre Frantz Fanon of Turin who has started therapeutic treatments with some of the girls has proved to be of extreme importance. In certain cases, the social service workers and the cultural mediator have put in place informal methods for listening to and supporting the girls but at times they are put off by the symbolic and religious language the women use.

“Since they believe in it, we cannot just tell them that the magical and religious practices that go with the oath for the repayment of the debt are nonsense. We must come to terms with these beliefs and consider them an important part of their story; we must respect them and allow them their dignity. If a girl tells us about the *woodoo* or *ju ju* rites we cannot make fun of her by telling her that these things do not exist, it does not work! We must try to understand those ideas and their reasons, trying to help them as much as we can” (Int. No.12). “The relationship that the Nigerian women have with the ministers of the Protestant churches is very important. The Nigerians, especially when minors, very often respect and trust these ministers unconditionally even though, with their mystical behaviour, they reinforce the girls’ beliefs and hinder their emancipation process” (Int. No. 15).

The girls basically ask for a job and a house of their own. The need for money is very strong, reinforced by the frequent family requests urging them to fulfil their duty by sending money home, thus hindering the girls’ inclusion in training programmes. The majority of them have great psychological difficulties in following a training course on a regular basis, even if they are trying to follow an Italian language class. At present (February 2009) most of these girls have found work in private homes.

“The only real work we can find for these girls is as baby-sitters or as caretakers of elderly people” (Int. No. 13). To meet these girls’ need to lead an independent life, the agency has opened two semi-autonomous apartments, one as required by the project and co-financed by the public authorities, the other was donated by a religious agency that works with the association. Both have been open for 10 years.

6.4 The “Jerry Essan Masloo” medical and social service agency, Castel Volturno⁷⁴

Geographical context and Nigerian prostitution

Naples and Caserta are the two cities most affected by prostitution in the Campania region. While at present the situation of Naples seems to be more heterogeneous as far as nationalities are concerned, the area of Caserta, and above all in the Domitian area, i.e. the coastline, counts more immigrants coming from Africa, namely from Nigeria and more specifically from Edo State. The area counts both a strong presence of male immigration and not only

74 The case study is based on interviews with the head of the service R. Natale, the doctor coordinating the consulting room and the mobile street unit, G. Grasso and Sister Antonia, coordinator of the reception services. Materials produced by the service were also utilized.

on a seasonal basis, and a presence of many women (not only from Nigeria) forced into prostitution. The area offers a great deal of low-cost housing since “there was a great real estate development in the ‘60s when there was a drive to develop tourism, even though it was realized without any urban planning or adequate infrastructure. The 1980 earthquake in Irpinia forced many Neapolitan families to move here but they left when they received the money for rebuilding their houses. So, these houses were rented to the immigrants that came here to work. With time the entire area downgraded and the pine forest has become a place for illicit transactions and drug dealing” (Int. No. 70).

The association’s reports record an increase in Nigerian women working on the Castel Volturno coastline in recent years. In the spring of this year, minors were estimated to account for approximately 16-18% of the total, i.e. approximately 60 to 80 women out of a total of 400, reversing the downward trend of past years, i.e. between 250 and 300 women. The exploited Nigerian women “are mostly girls and women who practice prostitution in the same place they live and, but much less, in the nearby towns of Casal di Principe, Aversa and so on. Some of these women, especially the young ones, frequently move in small groups from place to place; they go as far south as Salerno or Battipaglia or to the North, towards Mondragone, near the border with Lazio. Castel Volturno is the place of residence and exploitation for some of the minors while for others it is only where they live and they move around Caserta and Salerno for work” (Int. No. 71).

The Nigerian women and girls arrive following the by now well-known paths. What has changed is the sea voyage from the coastline of Zuwara, Libya, to Lampedusa and from there to Sicily. Some of the girls tell about the violence they underwent before embarking, about the Nigerian and Libyan traffickers buying and selling them behind their backs (the *brother* at times leaving them in the hands of Libyan exploiters), about the rapes they suffered as “initiation” or about the extreme violence of getting them pregnant so that the Italian Coast Guard will protect them once on shore.

“Some of the girls, as well as some of the adults, are forced to practice prostitution in the Tripoli or Misurata brothels, cities where the latest figures (spring 2009) report that there are approximately 700 to 900 Nigerian women respectively, 30% of them less than 18 years old. The remaining women are between 19 and 25 years old and only a very small share are 15. Women represent approximately 1/3 of the estimated total (300 on approximately 900 persons) a part of whom, not easily circumscribed, being sexually exploited during their stay in Libya. Only 40-45 percent of the Nigerian men and women in Libya leave for Italy, via Lampedusa. The others stay in Libya and try to find a job there”.

Main features of the minors served by the agency

The statements collected show that the number of girls forced into prostitution has increased in the past two years, although some of them are prostitutes’ daughters who have not been able to integrate. In short, there are women whose daughters are forced into street prostitution and that their men exploit, i.e. men that exploit the mother as well as her young daughter. We must however mention that the total number of girls “is an estimated figure

ascribable to the perception we have when they arrive in the medical unit” (Int. No. 70). The social profile has changed a lot in these past years, “Before, there were many women and girls with a high school diploma or even a university degree that wanted to come to Italy to work as cleaners or agricultural labourers or whatever they could find. Now we face the unexpected arrival of minors with very low schooling” (*ibid.*).

“The better educated girls living in Benin City are reluctant to undertake costly and difficult journeys and, once here, to be forced into prostitution. Young girls from rural areas have no experience of the world outside their village, they barely went to school; it’s easier to recruit them” (Int. No. 71). “Coming from the countryside around Benin City they are often more disoriented, more scared and totally in the hands of the *maman* and her accomplices, the *baba-loa* to start with” (Int. No. 72).

The *baba-loa* instead of “performing rites for propitiating a good journey, the girl’s success and health, twists them into evil rites, bending them to the will of the *maman*. Thus, the girl becomes a hostage until she pays back the amount of money decided arbitrarily by her persecutors. The few thousand euro actually needed for the journey multiply five/tenfold: the first 2,000 euro become 30, 40 or even 60 thousand in a few weeks or months, the time needed to arrive in Castel Volturno. Many of these girls suspect what they will have to do once in Italy but they do not know where and how high the psychological and physical costs will be” (*ibid.*).

Many of these girls “do not have a regular residence permit and have not undergone any anthropometric test for establishing their age. In general, they prefer not to declare it since they have many doubts about it and some of them ask if declaring they are older is better than the contrary. We tell them to tell the truth but it is hard to convince them” (Int. No.70). The age of the girls “is almost never less than 14 or 15, unless they are the daughters of women living in Castel Volturno and born at the beginning of the ‘90s’ who are involuntarily following their mother’s steps, herself in the hands of a *maman*. In general, they are 17 years old when they arrive here. Usually this is the youngest age we perceive” (*ibid.*).

Some of them say that at home they worked in very simple jobs, fit for a child or a very young teenager living in the country side. They say they helped their parents in their craft – as hairdressers or aestheticians – or helped them toil their vegetable gardens.

The agency structure

The medical unit “Jerry Masloo” was founded by a group of volunteer doctors for the care of foreign immigrants who came during the summer months to pick tomatoes and other produce. The first unit opened in Villa Literno in 1990, in an abandoned place that these doctors transformed into a medical field hospital. Life was not easy in a land of organized crime and the unit kept moving from place to place also because of the hostility and xenophobia of local violent groups. In 1995, the association moved for the umpteenth time to the diocesan Caritas First Aid Centre “Donazione Fernandes”, near Castel Volturno.

Although faced with a permanent shortage of personnel the volunteer doctors manage to

keep the unit open twice a week and have developed a project for the construction of a “Epidemiological Centre and an ethno-psychiatric Unit” in cooperation with the Public Centre for Drug Addiction (SERT) of San Paolo, Naples that finances it for a very small part. “At the beginning the interventions with the Nigerian women – but also with women coming from Eastern Europe – were not easy: mistrust, false information from the Italian and foreign exploiters and from the *maman*. The worst of these lies was that the medical check up meant that the doctor would give the medical case history to the Police for initiating the expulsion procedure” (Int. No. 71).

“We constantly kept in touch with these women; we gave them as much attention as we could to try to meet their needs, without ever judging their behaviour. Little by little more and more women of every age kept knocking at our door, asking our help for theirs and their children’s medical needs. Next to the medical requests some of them started asking us how they could exit their slavery condition and some of them told us their real age. We understood that we were gaining their trust, finally” (*ibid.*). The growth of the medical unit goes hand in hand with that of the Centro Fernandes that ensures initial help, a canteen for the most deprived, recreational activities and training. In the eyes of the women, even for the Nigerians especially if women and girls, this made the medical unit totally compatible with the other activities that we were carrying out. The high presence of Nigerians called for a cultural mediator that, with time, has been joined by others, thanks to the cooperation with the Nigerian Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Benin City also.

“The nuns act as mediators in the most complex cases even in relation to the religious rites of the *voodoo* and the *voodoo* mechanisms that need to be put in place for letting these women feel that they have freed themselves from the magic spells” (Int. No. 70). The network is very ample and goes beyond the Centro Fernandes and the Congregation of the Sacred Heart (located in a nearby building). It includes the Ursuline Nuns in Caserta (Comunità Rut) for the residential unit, the Laila Association that hosts children coming from disadvantaged families, and the Combonian Priests. The medical unit also manages a medical mobile unit for harm reduction, small first aid interventions on the streets and HIV monitoring” (*ibid.*).

“We had some very difficult years due to the increase of the Nigerian nationals in our community, to the many projects we had to manage for granting the resources we needed to develop our medical unit and, due to the institutional activity they ask us to perform for safeguarding the health of the population, foreign and native” (*ibid.*). At present the Association has a staff of 10 volunteers, doctors and paramedics. It has good relationships with the Public Health Centres and the city hospitals, relationships that, when needed, come into play for implementing individualised social and health interventions. The street unit has been working regularly in recent years, mainly inside the pine forest of Castel Volturno.

Social and health activities

Communicating with the women that come to the service is a major problem. The problem is not so bad with the older women who have been in Italy for a longer time but it gets worse

and worse as the age lowers. Those who have arrived most recently, i.e. between the spring of 2008 and that of 2009 meet with the greatest difficulties since they live in close contact with their compatriots and do not speak Italian at all. “The condition of subjugation of this community as a whole, and that of the enslaved women, more so if minors, implies that these people must live in a very close social circle that does not allow any communication with the outside world, hence, the lack of Italian. The medical unit and the Centro Fernandes have organized Italian classes for Nigerian women as a way to build trust between the girls and our workers”, a doctor says (Int. No. 71).

Over and above the medical visits, the young girls, especially if single mothers, always ask for small cash contributions for buying milk or a new dress for the child or of for medicines. This is very common for the women that are not have a regular status in Italy. Most of the times the doctor gives the necessary medicines directly but, at times, they must be bought. The small amount of money that the association gives them is a way to make sure that they will return, making it possible to follow their health. “But, some of these girls give the money we give them to other girls that need it even more badly than they do. So, these small amounts rotate and we believe it to be a good way to experiment with mechanisms of money lending as well” (*ibid.*).

Job searching is another activity that has been put in place. So far, however, the experience has not been always successful, the only available jobs being in the homes of some Italians, particularly sensitive to the issue, or in some cheese firms. This difficulty reflects the long-standing lack of employment that has always characterised this part of Italy that mainly offers seasonal, and poorly paid, work. As a matter of fact there are plenty of agricultural jobs during the summer months and a fierce scarcity of any work throughout the rest of the year. “This difficulty is often intertwined with the lack of the residence permit. It is very hard to transform a residence permit for humanitarian reasons into one allowing you to work since it almost impossible to get a regular job around here. Most of the available jobs are in the shadow labour market and therefore we mostly have a shadow workforce” (Int. No. 70).

“It is very difficult for a girl that signed on to a protection plan under Art. 18 to find a regular job”. Many girls do not succeed and “Despite our efforts often the girls go back to their irregular status. It is extremely difficult to reverse this trend once you are into it and live here. This is why many of the girls do not trust the social protection programme and they keep making a living in the street” (*ibid.*).

6.5 Shared weak points detected

Notwithstanding the high degree of efficiency of the organizations we briefly analysed, the heads of the agencies we interviewed point out that there are difficulties, some of them not easy to solve. Yet, they reflect the high degree of development of these services. The areas where the agency operates, the social and institutional climate characterised by the binomial reception/no reception, the community are factors that greatly influence the services’ chance for reinforcement and development. The ability of social service agencies to deliver new services and to respond to arising and new needs, both organizationally and profes-

sionally depends not only on the agencies themselves but also on the choices made by local institutions.

This ability cannot be detached from the variables related to the age and the nationality of the women served since it requires highly specialised professional skills and constant training. The three case studies show that the gap between the presence of young girls as perceived through the years and the ability of the service agencies – and the police force – to intercept them and ensure that these girls are taken care for and adequately protected, is the weakest point of all. As a matter of fact, the girls actually served by these agencies amount to one out of five-to seven intercepted cases.

This gap can be explained in two ways. There is a need to enhance the skills of the social service workers that work as “initial contact”. “Generally they are good professionals but they should be so when minors are concerned as well” (Int. No. 17). Training should be more frequent. “We have it... and it is well structured but training should be extended and organized on a more continuous basis” (Int. No. 74), and it should focus on issues related to the young victims. There is therefore a need to reinforce the interventions for the under-age groups, above all the Nigerians, because of the cultural and social implications that come to the surface in the relationship between them and the services. The mechanisms for interception, first contacts, service provision, the residential and post-protection structures for minors should be reinforced. There is a need to ensure more frequent school insertions and training aimed at the acquisition of the residence permit.

STAFF TRAINING NEEDS



7.1 Working with Victims of Trafficking. A general issue

The offer of help to women victims of trafficking is articulated on various levels: from contacts initiated through the work of the street units to reception of women who request assistance at offices of community-based service providers; from initial reception to placement in centres or shelters or autonomous housing, from job training to job-search support. Overall, all of the service providers interviewed have at least ten years experience in working with victims of trafficking, including those of Nigerian nationality. This lengthy experience has allowed them gradually to develop an approach based on so-called “natural” or “spontaneous training,” since the transmission of expertise takes place, as the title implies, spontaneously and through the progressive self-adjustment of the experience which matures inside the organization.

In other words, training is based on the practice of social services (acquired in professional or university training courses) and is defined and developed through the use of self-reflective techniques and the relationships that staff establishes with victims of trafficking by dealing with the problems as they arise. In addition to this on-the-job training, each service provider – or long-term ongoing project – has also used approaches that can be defined as “intentional training,” that is, organized and structured in relation to the demands and needs expressed by social service staff within the organization.⁷⁵ These formal training initiatives – as described by interviewees – generally take the form either of seminars and conferences organized along the lines of continuing education courses (generally brief and intermittent, not always constant over time and, above all, not always with the participation of experts), or as supervision classes, based on the analysis of individual cases (Int. No. 16). In essence, the professional experience places the operator into a self-reflexive process through the observation of his/her own organizational activities – as well as those of his/her colleagues – and the concrete relationships that he/she maintain with the beneficiaries, developing a general knowledge that is subject to verification in daily actions and relationships.⁷⁶ These professional training processes – with their double tracking – are connected to all the phases that distinguish the delivery of social protection services.

In these various phases, the helping relationship and its effectiveness is pursued by triggering mechanisms that tend to balance the capacities expressed by the organization and the capacities expressed by the staff involved in the process. The services under study – by placing beneficiaries at the centre of their activities – create the organizational and professional prerequisites for responding to the needs which their beneficiary population expresses (or does not express, when the traumas experienced do not allow an elaboration of the victim’s own needs and therefore the possibility to formulate specifically directed requests). The professionalism of the service provider’s staff, therefore, is expressed through the imple-

75 For the distinction between natural and intentional, see Susi F., *La formazione nell’organizzazione*, Rome: Anicia, 1994, p. 52 ff.

76 Nicoletti P., *Apprendere sempre*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005, pp. 30-31.

mentation of practices aimed at following the victim through the various phases of personal growth within the more general itinerary of social protection, including post-residential follow-up (when called for).

Practices which can be characterized as social (Int. No. 71), therefore with the assiduous presence of staff members and cultural mediators; psychological, with the analysis of therapeutic techniques for dealing with trauma and trying conditions (Int. No. 34); medical, in the case of specific health needs (Int. No. 78); and legal for issues related to their status as “foreigners” and/or “victim of trafficking” (Int. No. 79). In other words, we are talking about practices and activities which give substance to what is often defined as accompanying trafficking victims toward autonomy and independence with “interdisciplinary support on an integrated level”. This approach aims to activate interventions of empowerment – or an “action aimed at awakening the personal self-management capacities” of the beneficiaries, to use the words of one interviewee (Int. No. 3). This is done with both socio-psychological techniques and techniques related to professional training, by reinforcing/reawakening previously acquired skills, the construction of a new identity, the active search for employment, and therefore workforce integration for the women – adults and minors – in non-protected scholastic or work environments.

One aspect that emerges from a series of interviews and which seems to be common to various protective services agencies – particularly non-governmental ones – is their economic fragility; an economic fragility that reverberates throughout the entire organization and which is often the cause for the high turnover rates among staff. This turnover may involve different organizational structures and may therefore require constant structural adjustments that negatively influence one or more of the intervention phases.

Spread over different periods of time of the service’s life and of its structures, such dysfunctions lower the overall effectiveness of social service intervention, causing significant oscillations in quality between times when staff is more stable and times when the lack of resources pushes staff to work in unstable conditions and with reduced hours. This last condition also results in the loss of staff, who have already begun their professional training and reinforced their effectiveness, replacing them with others who are just beginning their careers.

In essence, what you see are social service agencies with a two-tier organizational structure: one group of staff members who are stable (economically as well) and professionally well trained, and a second group of younger and more vulnerable staff members who come and go out of the services without ever having the chance to acquire adequate skill levels to deal with the levels of engagement demanded by the agency’s beneficiary population, especially in the presence of a significant component of minor Nigerian beneficiaries. Levels of engagement which can also be measured in terms of stress and the capacity to manage trying situations posed by Nigerian beneficiaries who are victims of traumas like that of forced prostitution (Int. No. 34, 61 and 78).

7.2 Training Deficits in the Contact and Initial Reception Phases

These structural aspects of the organization are joined by other training-related issues – whether spontaneous/natural or intentional – for staff members working in the various phases of the intervention process.

This approach “also creates repercussions by extending the activity of the single social service provider to its functional relationships of a network nature that it promotes/pursues on the community level in order to best satisfy the various needs of victims” (Int. No. 16). This has also favoured the search for inter-organizational solutions to improve operative impact, such as the implementation of integrated networking strategies on a community-wide basis. This strategy has also contributed to the expansion of exchange relationships and communication flows, both formal and informal, between staff belonging to different organizations/service providers (both public and private), helping to reinforce skills and know-how and to define shared methods of intervention to facilitate social work and support individual staff in their relationships with victims of trafficking.

It can be inferred from the interviews, that staff members have developed a capacity to read, confront, and manage their helping relationships with victims of trafficking, both adults and minors (including those from the Nigerian community) even though there is no lack of the problems inherent to this type of social intervention, as the three cases we analysed clearly show. Experience in the field, the assiduous practice of social work, the capacity to mediate between proposals and offers for intervention and those kinds of intervention actually available to service agencies, and the special requirements of minors, are the elements that determine the effectiveness of actions aimed at the social rescue of victims and in part their later social integration.

In all of this, the *ad hoc* training of agency staff appears to be a strategic and indispensable ingredient for the best handling of the particularly complex situations. In the specific case of work with very young Nigerian girls, some interviewees (Int. No. 9 and 48), point out that the training deficits of staff working on the streets or in mobile units are already partially visible at the moment of the initial contact on the street, that is whenever the unit proposes to initiate the helping relationship.

In general, the skills gap between expert staff and less expert staff in this type of intervention is less evident, since in any case it is the expert staff member who always directs the operation of initial contact with the potential beneficiary (Int. No. 16). What seems to be different is the capacity of expert staff to establish the age of the Nigerian women in that this capacity is the product of experience, continuous observation (as one interviewee observes, speaking of “intuitive knowledge of their minority status” (Int. No. 1). In such cases, the joint reflections which are struck up between the various staff members are practically occasions for self-training of the street teams.

On the other hand, the capacity to dissuade – and also to convince – Nigerian minors to take the next step already presupposes a certain level of professional competence which

goes beyond the mere reasoned reflection of the team (Int. No. 31 and 33). It requires, in fact, training sessions of an intentional nature, because the women perceived as minors may turn out to be, on the basis of an anthropometric exam, older. In these cases, staff need to be able to manage in a “natural and relaxed manner” a change of relational approach based on the change in age attributed to the beneficiary. (Int. No. 34).

7.3 Training needs related to reception in a residential setting

Once the person has chosen to go through with the protection plan the Nigerian minors generally conduct themselves in peculiar ways, the operators report. “The “intra-community dynamics” – states one interviewee (Int. No. 30) – between the Nigerian minors and their adult compatriots may be conflicting, because the adults may try to take advantage of their more advanced age to insist that the younger girls have to obey them and perform little “services” for them”. “At least at the beginning, a kind of female hazing goes on”, says another interviewee (Int. No. 6). “The pre-existing hierarchies among the Nigerian women go on just the same, they’re respected; and they are hierarchies of mutual protection, mutual solidarity and so when they no longer perform that function they generally are not respected any more, they’re rejected. In these cases, respect is given to the ones who impose themselves as the strongest (...) but this creates conflicts that must be managed” (*ibid.*).

These tensions, however, are quite manageable by more expert staff but less so by their inexperienced colleagues. Younger staff may not have the acquired skills to deal with such tensions, they may lack the know-how or they may be inhibited by lack of confidence from displaying their skills “for lack of confidence and awareness of their professionalism”, as observed by another interviewee (Int. No. 71). The various strategies which are activated in a convergent manner (social, psychological, legal-juridical, and existential) in favour of underage beneficiaries are centred around the activation of mechanisms in support of their material stabilization, as well as their emotional-existential well-being.

Both have significant weight since they have a direct effect on their chances to free themselves from the yoke of their debt of honour. In fact, minors feel even more than adults the emotional weight of the family mandate signed at the moment of their decision to emigrate, and need more time and resources to get to the point of accepting the idea that they can no longer support their families who have invested in them and to whom they owe respect and gratitude. In these cases, says one staff person, “they’re the ones who ask for help” (Int. No. 1). So staff must focus their work on this request.

“It is also necessary – continues the same interviewee (*ibid.*) – to be delicate and alert. Not to go into subjects they don’t want to deal with, not to bring them up if they don’t want to, and not even name them. The work to be done is also a work of reflection on matters that might emerge regarding the family of origin, and re-education to the factual reality, to the new reality far away from the street and so from the criminal organization.” Points of mediation have to be found between their expectations which often are and remain, espe-

cially for the younger ones, to pay back the debt they contracted and put their families into better economic conditions. But all of this has to be recognized for what it is and what it represents, since the debt is usually huge, and the minor does not really understand that. Despite this, to use the words of other interviewees, in the group homes or shelters or in semi-autonomous homes it is rare for Nigerian minors to abandon the protection program they have signed on to; if they get through the initial reception and then go on to second, decision to drop out become much less frequent (Int. No. 18, 52, 57 and 76).

In other interviews, a small minority of the total, some rather important difficulties with the Nigerian minors come to light and in substance the service providers reveal their professional and organizational limitations. Some interviews (Int. No. 43) talk about the difficulties they run into in managing the helping relationships between staff members and Nigerian minors, especially “when the relationship is one on one, between staff member and beneficiary”. This would seem to be correlated to the fact that “the relationship of trust that the staff member has to establish is not just with the individual minor but with the whole group of Nigerian women living in the group home, because trust for them is also a collective issue and not merely a personal one” (Int. No. 34).

“We try to establish – continues the same interviewee – a dual relationship, based on the social service culture, that is, between the beneficiary and the therapist/social worker, and not immediately with the homogeneous group of clients, based on their nationality, as in the case of the Nigerian women”. “We have the impression that often the Nigerian under-age beneficiary does not want to communicate her problems, her private stories. Even the others look at you as if to say, ‘why are you asking me these things?’ Sometimes they take it badly and to make you happy they tell you ‘what you want them to tell you’ (*ibid.*) that is ‘the script.’” But another interviewee admits, “the experience of our organization is still not completely structured, we have noted some professional limitations in some parts of our team. It’s as though some members of the team were rigid, almost scholastic and not flexible at all, not able to adapt to the situations that the client population presents. We could use some special training, both on general culture and immigration, for example, which is specific to the relationship with immigrant beneficiaries and equally important, some continuing supervision to analyse the difficulties as they come up in the day to day life of the service: organizational, psychological, etc.” (Int. No. 41).

7.4 Experience in the field and cultural mediation

To show the importance of experience, both for the service organization and for individual staff members, some interviewees explicitly stated that the more experienced staff members are the ones who take the cases of the Nigerian minors. They affirm, in other words, that “staff with the most seniority are the ones best prepared to dialogue with and related to the Nigerian minors (Int. No. 16). “The most senior staff know how to deal with the issues of the Nigerian minors, and in fact the girls seem to entrust themselves to them spontaneously in a sort of benevolent and reassuring dependence” (Int. No. 1 and 43).

“Occasionally we happen to get some aggressive and even violent beneficiaries, and in those cases their containment becomes a priority for the whole agency. You have to be careful about how you organize the shifts, both day and night. For example, one thing that’s really important, is that you have to assign shifts to pairs considering their experience, so you assign the same shift to an expert staff member and a less experienced colleague (...) or you avoid assigning an inexperienced colleague to the night shift or on holidays, which is when conflicts are more likely to come out” (Int. No. 52). “Sometimes younger staff members are less prepared to deal with the problems presented by the Nigerian minors, when they posit the relationship only in terms of cultural differences. That way you can never come out ahead. The approach has to be intercultural but not stratifying the cultures, that is, considering the Nigerian culture as something that’s fixed and that’s separate from the individual beneficiaries. That’s the mistake made by more inexperienced staffers and they often get disoriented because they can’t get beyond that, they get stuck and they can also ruin their future effectiveness” (Int. No. 46).

Inter-cultural training is by now indispensable. “You have to react by assigning a peer or a cultural mediator of the same nationality as the beneficiary. Nigerian mediators have now become indispensable and we really couldn’t do without them. There are some aspects of the relationship that we just couldn’t deal with without them, even though the skills that we put into play are different and they have to change from case to case. The contribution of the mediators is useful for an initial orientation both for us and for the minor beneficiaries” (Int. No. 63). In this context, the mediators are considered by their colleagues as vehicles of knowledge about cultures believed to be different and that to understand them you need “time and patience” (Int. No. 6)⁷⁷.

Using Nigerian mediators along with social service workers thus appears to be a winning strategy “working together, in tandem, says another interviewee, we always find time to exchange views and impressions about individual cases, both the problematic ones and the unproblematic ones. Sometimes all you need is ten minutes with the cultural mediator to understand what happened, why that minor behaved in a certain way rather than another (...). Through the mediator’s interpretation you’re able to adjust your aim and get back the community equilibrium” (Int. No. 42). It would be better, however, if the role of the mediator were to become part of the permanent staff of social service agencies (with an *ad hoc* national law) and not remain a role to be activated in response to single problematic cases.

Their professional role must be recognized so that it can be put to its best possible use in all facets of social service work, both in relation to beneficiaries and in relation to staff/colleagues of the social services. The figure of the Nigerian cultural mediator should become the central axis around which services for this client group are organized, especially in the case of minors.

77 For further understanding some issues of the debate around the role of the cultural mediator and his/her skills, see *Formazione e Orientamento Professionale, La figura del mediatore culturale: il processo di definizione istituzionale*, Ministry of Labour, Rome, year IX, No. 4, July-August, 2009, p. 71 ff.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS



Our study of the exploitation of Nigerian underage girls focused on both the quantitative and the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon. This double focus is justified by the last decade oscillatory trend of this phenomenon, regarding both trafficked adults and girls, as the data collected by different sources show. These data, although partially conflicting, are nevertheless important since they give us a useful framework for establishing the number of people involved and therefore assess the social policies that need to be activated in order to satisfactorily respond to the requests of social protection but, also, for fighting the criminal organizations that manage the sexual exploitation.

When a social phenomenon becomes widespread – and responsive action by public institutions is called for – qualitative studies are sometimes insufficient. In order to be implemented effectively social policies need to “quantify” the phenomenon and transform it into something that is statistically visible. The numerical consistency of a social condition is what accounts in large part for its social significance and, when supplemented by information on its qualitative features, serves to construct an overall representation of it.

The minority status of victims, therefore, represents the new frontier of sexual exploitation of Nigerian women in these last years. The study revealed that the attribution of minority age may also be the result of data manipulation instigated by *maman* in the offices of vital statistics in the villages around Benin City whenever minority status is seen as an element favouring the expatriation of the potential victim or her sale at a better price (minors having a higher value in the prostitution market). Their minority status renders these young women more vulnerable and more susceptible to mystic-religious manipulation.

This oath, generally sworn to in the presence of the victim’s mother or older sisters and sometimes also in presence of her father, transforms her planned emigration for purposes of finding legitimate employment into a tacit exploitation project designed by the *maman* and her religious accomplices. The system correlated to the trafficking cycle (recruiting, contracting of the debt and oath of restitution, journey and border crossing) and to the cycle of exploitation (declaration and emphasis of debtor status and of the impossibility of effecting restitution except through forced prostitution) is rather similar for adults and minors, although in the case of minors the weight and impact of all the procedures which they are forced to go through becomes necessarily heavier and stronger to the point of taking on the specific conditions of enslavement.

The contracted debt takes on a triple significance, since it is at the same time economic (in a few weeks the initial value of a few thousand euro turns into an inestimable amount); moral, because the victim has sworn to repay, together with members of her family, and for this reason she is obstinately committed to repaying the debt; and finally psychological, because the minor remains strongly bound by her debt until its extinction. The victim lives through an existential drama concealed by magic because it is extremely difficult for her to free herself from her dependence on the *maman*, sanctioned by the religious ritual which she consciously took part in. The journey is marred by risk, peril and often violence. The organizational network put into action by the *maman* appears to be efficient on all levels, despite the many difficulties which must be overcome to reach and cross the Italian frontier. The victims are accompanied by a *brother*, often of their same age, sometimes older, with

functions of command (*master or boss*).

The national system of social protection has reached a certain level of effectiveness in helping minors to free themselves from forced prostitution. The difficulties to be overcome, however, are numerous. On the one hand, the violence used by the *maman* hinders the process of detachment from the victim's dependence; on the other, the victim's falsification of her age in order to avoid expulsion (according to the misinformation received from the *maman*) slows down the ascertainment of her minority status. Finally, the difficulties experienced by community-based service agencies to maintain a high level capacity to dialogue with the Nigerian beneficiary population, means that protective services are not always equal to the task. This happens because the staff in charge of the young Nigerian girls, as well as the Romanian and Moldavian, need very high level skills that are acquired with time.

These findings were confirmed by interviewees and reiterated by the heads of the agencies examined in the case studies: Novara, Venice, and Castel Volturno (Caserta). Dealing with minors and adolescents in residential settings, regardless of their nationality, requires high level skills which agencies sometimes do not have the time to develop adequately because, due to their precarious economic-financial status, they are subject to rather high staff turnover. This can lead to frequent and widespread changes in the personnel of service teams since the most expert staff members tend to change working environments, leaving younger and less experienced staff to work in positions of direct beneficiary services: street workers, information windows, reception in residential and non-residential service centres.

The dichotomy that comes to be created between professionally mature staff (who with the passage of time need more financial stability and experience a weakening, in fact, of their "social vocation") and staff still in the initial stages of their professional growth (who are satisfied with lower pay, having for the moment a higher degree of "social vocation") risks creating an imbalance in the system of community-based social protective services dealing with victims of sex trafficking. This situation, which we can neither generalize nor underestimate, is a spur to rethinking social policy in this sector with the aim of making services more stable and continuous over time, transforming the project-based interventions in stable and continuous services, for example.

On the basis of these brief considerations it is possible, on the one hand, to reinforce the laws and rules in favour of the under-age trafficked girls and, on the other hand, to outline some paths for future efforts to come up with adequate responses to current problems:

Legal issues

On the basis of the results of this study and of the breaches found by the social services' staff in the partial or inhomogeneous enforcement of the social protection law, particularly regarding the Nigerian girls, as third countries Nationals, in the Centres for Identification and Expulsion of Immigrants as well, we believe that the Institutions need to give more attention to such questions since:

- a. Nigerian minors are subject to social protection as provided by international agreements

(Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in November 1989) and national law (cited Articles 18 and 13) and, therefore, measures must be implemented to render those rights operative, including the exemption from expulsion of minors unaccompanied by an adult (see Art. 19, paragraph 2 of the Omnibus Act cited above);

- b. Nigerian minors – like other foreign minors – must be granted the right to a court-appointed guardian (Art. 19 of the Immigration Act), to be placed in custody of a public agency (Art. 32 of the Immigration Act) and protected (*idem*). Those living in Italy for at least 3 years or following a social integration programme for at least 2 years must be granted a residence permit once reached the age of 18 (Art. 32 *supp.* of the Immigration Act and Sentence of the Constitutional Court No. 198-03);
- c. Expulsion and repatriation can be decided only by a judge of the Juvenile Court, in the absence of elements indicative of the possibility for family reunification. The Court also has the authority to verify the minor's state of abandonment and provide for her protection through the appointment of a guardian (Art. 343 Civil Code).

Social issues

On the basis of the results of this study we believe it to be necessary that:

- a. reinforce/introduce *ex novo* information services in Centres for Identification and Expulsion of Immigrants aimed at minor victims of trafficking since there is a lack of information particularly regarding their right and opportunity to use provisions of current law (national and international), be assigned a lawyer, and be placed under care of a guardian;
- b. reinforce social research for the purpose of deepening our knowledge of the magic-religious manipulation characteristic of this particular beneficiary population and better understand the dynamics of the *maman*-victim relationship, and to transmit research findings to social service agencies involved in serving the Nigerian beneficiary population in general and minors in particular;
- c. further explore possibilities and modalities of putting Italian social service agencies in contact and collaboration with social services operating in and around Benin City, reinforcing and improving the quality of protective services in both countries.
- d. Further our knowledge on strategies to be put into play for networking the Italian services with those of Benin City, reinforcing their protection system in order to make them more efficient in both countries.

Another important issue emerging from the study regards the organization of the Office of Vital Statistics in Benin City and its surrounding villages. Their organizations should be modelled on new procedures for the issuance of electronically readable passports and visas so that birth certificates (and therefore verification of age and minority status) can be issued without the risk of counterfeiting and falsification, thus eliminating one of the weapons used by *maman* to expand the market for the buying and selling of minors.

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