

CHATELS OF THEIR FAMILIES: TRAFFICKING OF YOUNG WOMEN AS GENDER VIOLENCE

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Abstract

Trafficking in persons has become a global phenomenon with the existence of trafficking syndicates and hubs in major cities of Africa, Asia, Europe and America. The trade is as varied as the dynamism of the syndicates. Human persons especially young women have become commodities to be traded and retraded by criminal syndicates for the purposes of sexual and labor exploitation. This paper interrogates the nexus between trafficking in young women and patriarchy as a form of gender violence. It argues that trafficking in young women is symptomatic of their inferior position within the social structure especially in patriarchal societies. It views this as a form of gender violence in the sense that majority of those trafficked were impelled into trafficking situations by loose networks of family members. The data for this chapter was derived from the data generated in a survey of young women aged 15-25 years in Benin City, Nigeria. The study adopted an eclectic methodological approach, which involved the administration of questionnaire, key-informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The study shows that there is a correlation between patriarchy and trafficking in young women because majority of those trafficked were encouraged and financed by family members. Anchoring the analysis on radical feminism it concludes that trafficking in young women is a form of gender violence associated with the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking manifests in different forms in various societies. The phenomenon predates the transatlantic trade. It refers to the illicit transfer of persons from one milieu to another especially from developing and transition economies to the developed economies. It is bifaceted- the first refers to trafficking as defined above while the second is the aiding and abetting of illegal migration. Specifically, trafficking in young women involves the movement of young women from countries of origin to destination countries for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Trafficking in persons re-emerged as a burning issue during the mid 1980s amid the concern over changing migration flows, HIV/AIDS, child prostitution and child sex tourism and the revitalization of the feminist movements (Pharaoh, 2006). It assumed prominence in the 1990s with numerous

advocacy efforts culminating in the signing of the Palermo Protocol in 2000. The Palermo Protocol was the first international broad based response on an issue that had tasked policy makers since the late 19th century (Pharaoh, 2006). The Palermo Protocol defined human trafficking as:

...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud or deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations, 2000).

This definition takes into account the three fundamental elements in human trafficking namely recruitment, mode of transfer and exploitation. In addition, it accounts for the activities of the numerous actors engaged in the phenomenon. The Palermo Protocol brought to the fore the victimization and violence meted to those trafficked. These two elements were often over looked in other definitions of human trafficking.

1.2. The Problematique

One complex issue in conceptualizing trafficking is that it is an umbrella term that covers various outcomes such as sexual slavery, child prostitution and exploitative labour. Anderson and Davidson (2004), posits that trafficking falls within a continuum of experience. This ranges from:

People transported at gun point, then forced into labour through the use of physical and sexual violence or death threats to people who are not deceived or coerced in any way are well paid and work in an environment that respects and upholds their human rights.

Luda (2003), views the phenomenon as a problem of exploitation. It refers to all criminal activities having to do with the licit or illicit transportation of persons from one milieu to another. This definition covers two distinct elements- the transportation and illicit migration of others. Each author attempts to conceptualize it within the confines of its own discipline. Authors like Nagle (2007), take a legalistic approach to the problem. She views it as a crime against the victim who is denied the freedom to choose in the hands of the trafficker. She argues that the victim does not consent to be transported or even where there is consent that it becomes irrelevant due to the use of coercion, force or misrepresentation. This definition portrays the victim as completely innocent and oblivious of the outcome of the situation. However, this perspective fails to take cognizance of those situations where “victims” ab

initio consented to being trafficked and are even aware that they would participate in commercial sex work (CSW).

In Nigeria, trafficking in young women is often viewed through the prism of prostitution. This definitional problem has given birth to policies that tend to criminalize prostitution without proffering solutions to the problem. For instance, Edo State which has been identified as a hub for trafficking in young women legislated against human trafficking and the prostitution of women (UNESCO, 2004). Despite the enactment of this law, the incidences of trafficking in young women continue to increase. Benin City, the capital of Edo State has been identified as the headquarters of trafficking in young women (UNICRI, 2004, Okonofua *et al*, 2004, Onyeonoru, 2004). Young women are lured by traffickers and loose net work of family members with promises of good jobs and better well being in Europe. Often, they are trafficked to Italy, Spain, Germany, Netherlands and even France (Omorodion, 1999, Otoide, 2002).

It has been estimated that as many as 80% of Nigerian young women trafficked into Italy are indigenes of Edo State, Nigeria (Aghatise, 2002). This problem has engendered the signing into law by the National Assembly in 2003 of the Trafficking in persons (prohibition) Act. It also culminated in the setting up of an agency known as NAPTIP (National agency for the prohibition of the traffick in persons and other matters) to arrest and prosecute traffickers as well as rehabilitate those trafficked but deported. In addition, other security agencies such as the Nigerian Police Force and Nigeria Immigration Service have human trafficking units with the mandate to arrest traffickers and their agents and transfer to NAPTIP for prosecution. There are also many non- governmental organizations (NGOS) working in the area of assistance and rehabilitation of deported trafficked persons. In spite of these initiatives the problem is yet to abate.

2.0: Theoretical Underpinning: Radical feminism

Gender theories are characterized by the following- (1) men and women are unequally situated in society. (2) Women have little or no access to material resources, social status, power and opportunity for self actualization. (3) This inequality is structural and not biological and (4) every human person is desirous of freedom and self actualization and as such women could do with more egalitarian structures and situations.

Radical feminism is anchored on two fundamental postulates. First, women are of absolute positive value, a belief asserted against the universal devaluing of women. Second, women are generally oppressed though the level of oppression varies from one society to another. They are violently oppressed by the system of patriarchy (Atkinson, 1974, Bunch, 1987, Chesler, 1994). Radical feminists averred that of all the systems of domination and subordination, that the most fundamental structure of oppression is gender, the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and subjugation but continues as the most enduring and pervasive system of inequality (Lerner, 1986). Through patriarchy men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt see them as inferior and control them. Central to this argurement is the image of

patriarchy as violence against women. Violence in this instance may not be physical but hidden in practices of exploitation and control. In standards of fashion and beauty, in tyrannical ideals of motherhood, monogamy, chastity, unpaid household drudgery and unpaid wage work (Mackinnon, 1979, Wolf, 1991, Thompson, 1994). Physically patriarchy foists violence on women through rape, incest, enforced prostitution, and sexual molestation of children, abuse of widows and in the context of Benin City the cultural practice of primogeniture which ensures that women cannot inherit movable and immovable property both from their nuclear families and their families of orientation. In addition, it engenders the commodification of young women by impelling them into trafficking situations to better the life chances of other family members. Young women are encouraged by their fathers and other male members of the family to follow traffickers by entering into negotiations with them on behalf of young female family members. Patriarchy succeeds because men can muster the most basic power resource, physical force to establish control. Once patriarchy is in place, economic, ideological, legal and emotional resources are marshalled to sustain it. The Benin culture accords women inferior status and it is through this process that women are commodified and controlled with the sole purpose of enriching the family.

3.0 Method

Method is simply the research techniques used for data collection and analyses. These consist of the study area, sample size, sampling procedure, the instrument used for data collection and the method of analysis.

3.1 The Study Area: The study from which this data was derived was conducted in Benin City, Nigeria. Benin City is the capital of Edo state. Benin City is made up of three local governments namely Egor, Oredo and Ikpoba- Okha. Benin City has a population of 1,085,676 persons of which women constitute over 50 per cent which is 543,122 (2006, census). The Bini are mainly Edo speaking. The Bini are patrilineal and residence is virilocal. The father (erha) is the head of the family. He is honoured and revered and exercises absolute control over his household (UNICRI, 2004). The rights and obligations consequent upon membership of family groups are conceived of in terms of master/servant relationship (Bradbury, 1957). All his dependants including his wife/wives and children are akin to his servants.

The people are predominantly Christians. But despite this professed belief in Christianity, they believe in the efficacy and omnipotence of their gods. In spite of being the capital of the state, its economy is basically subsistence farming with few light industries. It is a patriarchal society with the Oba at the apex, followed by the chiefs, the priests and men generally. Women are deemed to be inferior especially unmarried and barren women as only those women married with sons are accorded some respect.

3.2 Sample Size/ Research Procedure: The sample size for the study from which the data for this paper was derived was 1160 categorized as follows- 915 randomly selected young women aged 15- 25 years, 235 trafficked but deported young women who were purposively selected from two rehabilitation centres and 10 key informants comprising

officials of NGOs, Community leaders, Government officials and religious leaders. The 235 trafficked but deported young women were purposively selected from the Committee for the Support of the dignity of women (COSUDOW) and Idia Renaissance (an NGO run by the wife of the former Governor of Edo State). The young women had been trafficked to Italy and Spain but were deported. The research procedure was eclectic comprising survey research, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

3.3 Research Instrument: Data from the sample was obtained through the survey method. In addition, eight of those with long sojourn abroad were identified and further interviewed using the in-depth interview method. Some key informants were equally interviewed. Eight respondents who had stayed in Europe for some years were probed for answers on their socio-demographic characteristics, employment history/status, family history and income to ascertain their family status. Questions were also asked on their activities while they were in Europe and if they were into any form of relationship since they returned. Finally, they were asked questions on their rehabilitation and whether they were happy staying in Benin City or they would prefer to return to Europe. To further enrich the data four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with the parents of the respondents. Two FGDs each were held with the fathers' groups and the mothers' groups. One each for fathers of those not trafficked and those trafficked but deported. One each was also held for mothers of those not trafficked and those trafficked but deported. Each FGD had a total of 12 participants.

4.0 Results/Discussions

Table 1: Age distribution of Respondents Frequency/ (%)

Age Distribution in years	Ever Trafficked
15-19	23 (9.8)
20-24	79 (33.6)
25+	133 (56.6)
Total	235 (100)
Mean	21.93 years
Median	22 years

Table 1 above is the age distribution of those trafficked but deported. The figures show that majority of the respondents that is 56.6 % were aged 25 years and above. Those aged 20-24 years were 33.6 % whereas 9.8 % of the respondents were aged 15-19 years. Their median age was 22 years. The large percentage of those found in the age category 25 years and above is not unconnected with the fact that most of the deported respondents had spent many years in their countries of destination before they were deported. Many had become madams but suffered deportation as a result of having some differences with the syndicate that offered them protection. This was buttressed by the narrative of CB who spent 10 years in Italy before she was deported:

I was about 15 years old when I traveled to Italy with my auntie. I served her for four years and got my freedom. I started my own business and even recruited three girls that work for me. But I had problems with the syndicate. They

were always demanding protection money. At a time I decided to call their bluff and they set me up with the police.

In terms of religious affiliation, 93.6 % of the respondents professed Christianity while 4.7 % were Moslems. Those categorized as practicing African traditional religion were 1.3 % while 0.4 % did not belong to any of the categorized religion.

Table 2: Marital status of Ever Trafficked Respondents Frequency/ %

Single	194 (82.6)
Married	41 (17.4)
Total	235 (100)

As shown in Table 2, 82.6 % of those ever trafficked were single while only 17.4% of the respondents were married. This finding is consistent with both empirical and theoretical evidence that global sex industry prefers young and agile women. The findings of (Butegwa, 1996, Nagle, 2007) lend credence to this assertion that traffickers prefer young and single women.

Table 3: Educational Qualification of the Ever Trafficked (%)

Education	Frequency (%)
None	5 (2.1)
Primary	32 (13.6)
Secondary	160 (68.1)
Post secondary	32 (13.6)
Others	6 (2.6)
Total	235 (100)

The data distribution in Table 3 shows that the highest percentage of those ever trafficked 68.1 % had a secondary level education. For post secondary education, 13.6 % of the respondents had post- secondary education; another 13.6 % had just primary education. While 2. % had no education at all and 2.6 % fell into the group categorized as others. This information is consistent with the works of (UNICRI, 2004, Okojie *et al*, 2003). They discovered that majority of those that were willing to be trafficked had secondary school education. This high percentage of willingness is not unconnected with the fact that a secondary school education cannot fetch a well paying job.

Table 4: Respondents Distribution by Financier

Trafficking Financier	Frequency	Percentage
Trafficker	89	37.9
Friends	23	9.8
Parents	109	46.4
Self/Husband	14	6.0
Total	235	100

It is interesting to note that over 50 per cent of the traffickees were sponsored by family members such as parents (46.4%) and self/husband (6.0%) as shown in Table 4. Traffickers sponsored 37.9 % of the respondents while 9.8 % said they were sponsored by friends. This information corroborates the findings of Pharaoh (2006) that despite the existence of criminal syndicates that most traffickers were loose networks of family members. The findings of (UNICRI, 2004) on Benin City are imperative. The conclusion is that virtually every Bini family has a family member involved in trafficking either as a traffickee, sponsor, madam or trafficker. That many families

pride themselves in having at least a daughter in Italy, Spain or Netherlands, pointing to houses, cars, boreholes and other material things acquired through the remittances of their daughters. The data gives a graphic picture of the role played by the family in trafficking buttressing the assertion in extant literature that migration in whatever guise is never an individual's decision. The quotation from an FGD with one of the father's groups brings to the fore the fact that family members especially fathers are involved in the decision as to who gets trafficked or not.

Why are you worried about this trafficking? how many companies are here in Benin City? This is our only way of surviving. When our children send us dollars we change the money and start a small project such as transport business or grinding of grains and pepper. It is our own democracy dividend.

The above quotation corroborates the views of Oyekanmi (2004) that Nigerian women are an underdeveloped resource, constrained by factors in and outside their shores. She opined that their fate is determined by culture and societal values. They are perceived by society as reproducers of society and providers of care and comfort. And as a result are commodified. The above assertion is consistent with the views of (UNESCO, 2004, Human Rights Watch, 1995) that due to the inferior position accorded women within the social structure that they become vulnerable to trafficking situations. (Poudel, 1994, Aladeselu, 1999) concurred that the low social values given to women contribute to trafficking. They averred that in some situations, these deep-rooted practices of gender discrimination which engender a cultural climate that perceive trafficking as morally acceptable, when in tandem with poverty-stricken living conditions tend to exacerbate trafficking. Similarly, attitudes that see women and girls as inferior commodify them; contribute to practices of recruiting them either by force, abduction or deception (UNICEF, 2003). In cases where family members push young women into trafficking, this is not considered harmful, as they are considered chattels of their families (Asian Development Bank, 2002).

In the context of Benin City, the rule of descent is patrilineal. The first son inherits both land and title from his father upon death. The system of land tenure is such that kin groups do not lay claim to tracts of land. Each adult male is dependent upon the village community in general rather than upon his own kin group. Women occupy inferior position in the social structure and are not entitled to any form of inheritance from their family of orientation due to the principle of primogeniture. They are equally precluded from such rights in their husband's families. However, those with male children do benefit indirectly through their sons. These discriminatory practices are forms of gender violence and they engender in women a feeling of inferiority and victimization. The result is that women are viewed by male members of their families as commodities to be traded at will. Pharaoh (2006) posited that a study of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy showed that repatriated victims were often derided by family members for not succeeding and told to find their way back to Europe. The study showed that parents were positively disposed towards trafficking as long as money was sent back to the families.

5.0 Conclusions

The commodification and marginalization of women have been a global phenomenon. It appears that advances in technology rather than reduce gender inequality heightens it. In

the context of Benin City, the family impels young women into trafficking situations through deceit and in certain instances outright coercion. Family heads decide who gets trafficked and negotiate with traffickers and syndicates on behalf of those to be trafficked. This situation reinforces the marginalization of women. That in patriarchal societies that women are not only commodified but become chattels of their families. This mindset not only engenders trafficking but equally encourages and supports the re-trafficking of those trafficked but deported. The cultural belief that the female gender is inferior to the male gender continues to reinforce and exacerbate gender inequality which in most cases engenders situations of violence.

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