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# Human Trafficking and Human Rights: The Movement of Women from Nigeria to Europe

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# **Human Trafficking and Human Rights: The Movement of Women from Nigeria to Europe**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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May 2013

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of human trafficking, especially the trafficking of young women and girls into exploitative and commercial sex labor, has recently attracted considerable local, national and international attention. This sex trafficking phenomenon exists against the backdrop of poverty, unemployment, and social instability, signaling a correlation between these elements. This research paper will define the concept of human trafficking in comparison to human smuggling and migration and will discuss the complexity in applying the definition. The magnitude and scope of the problem of human trafficking will be examined as well as its causes.

Human trafficking will be analyzed by international standards as an illegal practice and an illegal market. The paper will demonstrate how human rights discourse has become a key component in the modern-day discussion of sex work in terms of women's rights and labor rights. A central task of the human rights movement has always been to challenge conventional and traditional attitudes and customs towards practices that inflict harm, suffering or discrimination upon others. I will draw upon existing works in feminist theory in order to assess ways in which feminism, gender and sexuality often intersecting with race and class are included in the discussion of sex work and human rights.

The country concentration for this research paper is the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The phenomenon will be discussed in more depth through both liberal and feminist theoretical perspectives toward the end. Many of the sources used are Nigerian researchers who are likely to have a more local understanding of Nigerian migration, Nigerian trafficking and Nigerians in the sex work industry. This paper focuses on Nigeria as a case study in the West African region where projects are currently being implemented in reaction to growing trends of human trafficking as observed by the United Nations Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings.

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## Introduction

With advances in technology, intertwined economic systems, and ever-growing social networks and institutions, the world is more *globalized* than ever before. We now face *global* challenges rather than mainly national or regional challenges like in previous times. Some of these global challenges include financial recession, climate change, and population growth. Nevertheless, a more connected world has had its benefits. Globalization has allowed people to seek opportunities and escape problems of scarce resources, war, and natural disaster by migrating and resettling elsewhere. However, this has led to a series of international problems amongst which include transnational crime. The two most predominant transnational crimes involving human beings are human smuggling and human trafficking.

Over the past few decades, the migration, smuggling, and trafficking of human beings across international borders have grown at alarming rates. Human smuggling and trafficking specifically have affected a handful of countries becoming multimillion-dollar industries that are global in scope. While migration is defined as the voluntary movement from one country, place, or locality to another, the United States Department of Homeland Security recognizes human trafficking and human smuggling as distinct criminal activities. Human trafficking and smuggling are crimes that constitute grave violations of human rights.

According to the Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, issued by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Economic and Social Council, violations of human rights are both a cause and a consequence of the forced migration of persons. Human trafficking directly violates Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that all humans are born free and that no one shall be held in slavery or servitude in all of their forms. Human rights activists also argue that human trafficking violates the core values of freedom, dignity, and the right to self-determination. In December 1998, the United Nations General Assembly established an intergovernmental, ad-hoc committee and charged it with developing a new international legal regime to combat human smuggling and trafficking.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime observed that every year, thousands of men, women, and children fall into the hands of traffickers, in their own countries and abroad. Human trafficking and smuggling affects almost every country in the world whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims. From available statistics, it is said that about 500,000 women are brought into the United States of America and Europe yearly for sexual and domestic servitude. Of the over 70,000 African victims of women trafficking, Nigerian women account for 70 percent of those trafficked to Italy alone (Akor 1). Several socio-political, cultural, and poverty-related issues may account for the phenomenon of the trafficking of women in Nigeria. This paper examines the

causes and consequences of trafficking in Nigeria with an analysis of the problems with the current approaches used to address human trafficking at large.

## **Chapter 1: Background**

Trafficking in persons and human smuggling are some of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity, according to the United Nations. It often involves a number of different crimes, spanning across several countries, and involving an increasing number of victims. It is often characterized as the exploitation of people through force, coercion, threat, and deception and includes human rights abuses such as debt bondage, deprivation of liberty, and lack of control over freedom and labor. Trafficking can be for purposes of sexual exploitation or labor exploitation (Tahmisoğlu et al. 83).

The country of discussion in this paper is The Federal Republic of Nigeria. According to the United States Department of State's (USDS) annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report submitted by The Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, as of 2012, Nigeria is a "Tier 2" country. The Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons is an agency within the USDS that investigates and creates programs to prevent human trafficking both within the United States and internationally. The office presents an annual human trafficking report to Congress, dividing nations into tiers based on their compliance with the minimum standards outlined in the Trafficking in Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA). The minimum standards include:



(1) The government of the country should prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and punish acts of such trafficking.

(2) For the knowing commission of any act of sex trafficking involving force, fraud, coercion, or in which the victim of sex trafficking is a child incapable of giving meaningful consent, or of trafficking which includes rape or kidnapping or which causes a death, the government of the country should prescribe punishment commensurate with that for grave crimes, such as forcible sexual assault.

(3) For the knowing commission of any act of a severe form of trafficking in persons, the government of the country should prescribe punishment that is sufficiently stringent to deter and that adequately reflects the heinous nature of the offense.

(4) The government of the country should make serious and sustained efforts to eliminate severe forms of trafficking in persons.

Tier 1 countries are countries whose governments fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards. Tier 2 countries are countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. Tier 3 Countries are those whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. (U.S. Department of State) As a

tier 2 country, Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking.

My choice of the subject of human trafficking from Nigeria to Europe was strongly influenced by my personal experiences as a young Nigerian woman who studied abroad for a year of college in Strasbourg, France as well as my youth as a Nigerian immigrant in the United Kingdom. I have witnessed firsthand the adverse effects of the overflow of Nigerian immigrants and prostitutes in Europe. Today, I feel almost obligated to delve deeper into the subject matter out of a sense of duty to these women. It is without a doubt a subject very close to me.

As a student studying International Human Rights Law, I believe it is important to recognize trafficking in persons more as a matter of human rights and social justice, rooted in larger structural issues related to the global economy, human security, foreign policy, and labor and gender relations. In order to reframe the issue of human trafficking as a human rights issue, there would need to be an evolution of human rights discourse. Women's rights must be recognized as human rights, the same with labor rights as human rights, and the meaning of global justice and governance must be clearly underlined. In terms of trafficking in Nigeria, the ideas of labor rights and women's rights as human rights have not been integrated enough into the trafficking discourse.

To begin, we must first put human trafficking into the Nigerian context.

Trafficked Nigerians are recruited from rural, and to a lesser extent urban, areas within the country: women and girls for domestic servitude and sex trafficking, and boys for forced labor in street vending, domestic service, mining, stone quarries, agriculture, and begging. Nigerian women and children are taken from Nigeria to other West and Central African countries, as well as South Africa, where they are exploited for the same purposes. Children from West African countries, primarily Benin, Ghana, and Togo, are forced to work in Nigeria, and many are subjected to hazardous labor in Nigeria's granite mines. Nigerian women and girls, primarily from Benin City in Edo State, are subjected to forced prostitution in Italy, while Nigerian women and girls from other states are subjected to forced prostitution in Spain, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Ireland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Greece, and Russia. Nigerian women and children are recruited and transported to destinations in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, where they are held captive in the sex trade or in forced labor. In order to facilitate the trafficking, Nigerian traffickers rely on threats of voodoo curses to control Nigerian victims and force them into situations of prostitution or labor. Nigerian gangs traffic large numbers of Nigerian women into forced prostitution in the Czech Republic and Italy, and EUROPOL (short for European Police Office) the European Union's law enforcement agency that handles criminal intelligence, has identified Nigerian organized crime as one of

the largest law enforcement challenges to European governments. ((U.S Department of State 267)

So why is Nigeria such a problem? How is the critically acclaimed Giant of Africa posing a global threat to human and international security? Well first, Nigeria has a rapidly growing population of about 162 million. With increasing poverty and tough economic reform policies, Nigerians constitute the largest population in a significant flow of migrants from developing countries in Africa to industrialized countries in Europe and elsewhere. As a result of this growing trend to migrate, it is not surprising that many destination countries have reacted by imposing strict immigration laws. This has sparked significant international concern about the trafficking of Nigerian women and girls to various parts of the world, though predominantly in Europe.

There are many contributing factors to the high rates of trafficking of women and girls all over the world. The most common factors are poverty, corruption, crime and violence due to a trend of poor governance and colossal mismanagement of resources. These conditions contribute to emigration pressure. Corruption plays a significant role in facilitating emigration in violation of Nigerian and European immigration policy and laws which will be discussed in more depth later on. Corruption both facilitates trafficking and feeds the flow of people by destabilizing democracies, weakening a country's rule of law and stalling a nation's development. (Transparency International 2)

What are the methods of trafficking? Around the globe traffickers lure and coerce young women with promises of better opportunities and jobs offering travel abroad. Before the journey from Nigeria to Europe, the woman and the traffickers agree that she will be in debt roughly \$ 40,000-100,000, which usually takes about one to three years to pay back. The agreement for the young woman to pay off the debt through labor is sealed through religious rituals and is perceived as binding. In Europe, these rituals are often characterized as “voodoo” (also referred to as “juju” in Nigeria) and presented in a “sensational manner” (Carling 7).

Due to their vulnerable situation, certain asylum seekers can become victims of human trafficking, prostitution or economic exploitation. The number of Nigerian asylum seekers in Europe and America has increased in recent time. Some 10,500 Nigerians sought asylum last year in industrialized countries, compared to 9,500 in 2010, according to a report released by the United Nations refugee agency. The report ranked Nigeria 10th on the list of asylum claimants to the world's richest countries in 2011 (allAfrica). Nigerians account for an increasingly large portion of asylum-seekers arriving in Europe. In a few cases, the asylum system is being abused by traffickers to get Nigerian women and minors into the European prostitution market.

*Defining the problem*

Though trafficking in persons may take place in the margins of society, its presence must not be ignored. It is a grave violation of human rights, depriving a person of her right to life, liberty, security and self-determination. The fundamental individual right to life, liberty and security of person is reflected in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), Chapter II, Article 3 provides for the right of women to be free from violence within both the public and private spheres, specifically listing “trafficking in persons” as a form of violence against women, regardless of whether it involves the knowledge or acquiescence of state agents.

Trafficking in persons is often referred to as modern-day slavery. International documents such as those mentioned above cement this idea, setting international standards of right and wrong for all to accept. Many countries have ratified various international conventions that create obligations to prohibit slavery and slavery-like practices. While some sex trafficking situations may not involve the permanent ownership typically associated with slavery, they can involve exploitation and deprivations of liberty that render the situation tantamount to slavery. Slavery-like practices that can manifest in sex trafficking situations,

including servitude, forced labor, debt bondage, and forced marriages, are also prohibited.

Some acts of sex trafficking involve conduct that can be understood as a form of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, which is prohibited under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Article 5 of the UDHR and Article 7 of the ICCPR, and has attained the status of a norm. The failure to protect women from sex trafficking also represents a failure to ensure women's right to equal protection under the law. This is a well-enshrined principle of international law.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 35 affirms, "States Parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form" (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women).

The main argument cemented within these international documents and also posed by activists and international anti-trafficking agencies is that human trafficking is inherently demeaning and harmful. Executive Director of the Network for Justice and Democracy Olaide A. Gbadamosi Esq underscores the fact that human trafficking is incompatible with the worth and dignity of human beings in his book *Perspectives and Nigerian Laws on Human Trafficking*. The

research conducted in Gbadamosi's analysis serves to aid the understanding of trafficking in persons from a comprehensive human rights approach.

*Human smuggling and human trafficking*

By setting the foundation with a human rights based approach, it then becomes easier to understand the dynamics of human trafficking, which is notably different from human smuggling. By contrast to human trafficking, human smuggling is more concerned with the method of transit. Smuggling is often the result of an agreement between two parties: a potential immigrant who lacks the opportunity to immigrate legally, and a human smuggler offering his or her services in the form of fake documents and/or transport against payment. Often both parties are satisfied with the deal – the human smuggler receives the agreed payment, and the immigrant gets to enter the country as hoped. Today many people who wish to apply for asylum in Europe use human smugglers to reach European territory and present their application for asylum. The Geneva Convention states that if a person has valid reasons to apply for asylum, immigration regulations may be waived. There is no systematic relationship between refugees' needs for protection and their degree of dependence on human smugglers for reaching a country where an asylum application can be accepted. (Carling 9)

While human smuggling itself does not imply exploitation, it is clear that the human smuggler has the upper hand and may manipulate this situation. There are, for example, many examples of human smugglers abandoning the migrants



somewhere along the way, tricking them into believing that they had reached their destination and charging the payment. In other instances, payment is deferred and to be made to a third party once the migrant reaches the intended destination.

Human smuggling often occurs in dangerous conditions and costs several thousand lives at the outer borders of the European Union each year. Heightened measures to control and discourage human smuggling often force smuggling routes towards even more precarious means and passages. However, these measures cannot subdue the determination of both the smugglers and the migrants.

In comparison to human smuggling, trafficking in human beings involves, by definition, an element of exploitation. The most widely used definition of trafficking is stated in the UN Palermo Protocol:

*Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or*

*services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.*

Both human smuggling and trafficking occur in different ways in different cultural and political circumstances. For instance, there are great differences between the trafficking in women from Eastern Europe and from West Africa. The transition to a market economy in Eastern Europe has led to both opportunity and a loss of security for citizens of these countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union, similar to the decolonization of African states, has been identified as one of the main contributing factors in explaining the recent increase in human trafficking in this region. It provided both human capital and new regional opportunities to fuel the expansion. Since then, economic hardship visible in both Eastern Europe and West Africa and promises of prosperity have left many people vulnerable to trafficking within their countries and to destinations in other parts of the world. Unique to Eastern Europe are some of the situations that support trafficking, such as organized crime, and the recruitment strategies that perpetuate it. What is similar between these two regions is a common trait that many women working as prostitutes in Europe are motivated by the opportunity to support their families in their country of origin.

Though equally severe, the terms human trafficking and human smuggling are not interchangeable. Human trafficking centers on exploitation and is generally defined as sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force,

fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery. (U.S. Department of State) Human smuggling by contrast centers on transportation and is generally defined as importation of people into a country involving deliberate evasion of immigration laws. This offense includes bringing illegal aliens into the country, as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in the country. In short, smuggling is a method by which people are moved across borders, while trafficking is a more complex set of processes involving labor exploitation in destination countries. While smuggling is a means for transferring undocumented workers across borders, and it may or may not be associated with human rights abuses, trafficking is a far more severe process that exploits the labor of the victim.

Human trafficking is commonly characterized as the illegal sale of human beings, like commodities, in order to meet a demand for forced labor and commercial sex. Trafficking in humans is one of the most profitable and lucrative illegal industries in the world. Women and children constitute a large proportion of the trafficked persons; this is again largely driven by the high demand of sexual exploitation and sex slavery. This sex tourism industry flourishes in many developing and third world nations.

Both smuggling and trafficking are forms of what Assistant Professor and Academic Advisor at the University College Utrecht, the Netherlands Alexis A. Aronowitz calls “irregular migration” in his article *Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings: The phenomenon, the markets that drive it and the organisations that promote it*. While the definitions of smuggling and trafficking differ, there are shared, common elements. Irregular migration is understood as the unusual, unregulated and/or illegal movement of people within or across borders during a period of time. With recent records of “irregular” movement, many questions have surfaced. One of the most important concerns involves the conflict of human rights, mostly based on perspective. The international community has acknowledged the human rights of individuals to move freely as well as to enter their field of choice in the labor industry while on the other hand victimizing those trafficked. Often both smuggled and trafficked individuals leave a country of origin willingly. This fact further complicates the argument that those who migrate are victims of human smuggling or trafficking. The media and prevailing discourse on human trafficking have a tendency to convey an “increasingly apocalyptic image of the massive outflows of desperate Africans fleeing poverty and war at home.” (International Organization for Migration) The migrants are often depicted as victims of merciless and relentless traffickers and smugglers. This discrepancy will be discussed further later on in this paper. Though, the increase of African trafficking towards Europe over the past few decades is a reality, it is important to understand the phenomenon with a comprehensive human rights framework. This paper seeks to achieve a more micro-level

understanding of the phenomenon in the context and scale of Nigerian migration to Europe.

## **Chapter 2: Nigeria**

At the macro-level, for most Europeans, the image of Nigeria is most likely tainted by the negative attention given by Western media. News about Nigerians in Europe often focuses on prostitution and attempts at e-mail fraud commonly referred to as “4-1-9,” Reports from Nigeria in European news have also focused on violence, terrorism and radical Islam. All this negative attention causes Nigerians to be confronted with much skepticism and criticism. This projection of Nigeria has undoubtedly made the integration experience in Europe a challenging one.

In comparison to other African countries, Nigeria distinguishes itself mainly by its size and diversity. Nigeria will have a population of approximately 175 million inhabitants by July 2013, according to the World Fact Book. It has a growth rate of about 2.553% per year (World Fact Book). The country is today the seventh most populous in the world and the most populous nation on the African continent.

To understand the rapidly changing dynamics of the largest black nation in the world, we must first take a look back into Nigeria’s history. Nigeria became a British colony in 1914. Seven years after Independence on October 1, 1960, a

bloody civil war erupted. The southeastern parts of the country declared their independence as the State of Biafra but surrendered in 1970 after three years of war. After the civil war, nearly 30 years of military dictatorship followed. At first during this period there was much optimism and economic growth as a result of the development of the national petroleum agency. However, financial mismanagement and corruption limited the prosperity for most people. During the 1980s, the economy continued to deteriorate. The last military regime, headed by Sani Abacha from 1993 to 1998, was particularly ruthless. Following his death, free elections were held. Since then, substantial efforts have been made to reinforce democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of citizens' rights as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. Despite the numerous political reforms, corruption and resource mismanagement continue to make everyday life difficult for many Nigerians (Olukoju 51). Against the backdrop of abject poverty, a lack of political, social and economic stability, and a lack of reasonable or realistic prospects, Nigerians are pressured into finding the quickest way to make a living. An increase in the demand for cheap and often exploitable laborers tends to lure many people into taking large risks. One of these risks is entering the sex work industry. However, some groups of Nigerians tend to feel the pressure more than others.

#### *Ethnic groups, regional and religious differences*

Population growth in concentrated areas has likely contributed to Nigeria's great divisions. In comparison to the rest of Africa, Nigeria's diversity in terms of

ethnic groups remains unmatched. Nigeria has a history of ethnic division, ethnic conflict, and bloody civil war. Because of Nigeria's ethnic groups' inability to reconcile their differences, there has been much tension between regions in terms of political power. Post-military rule, the scramble for power ended with a decision to rotate the presidency between North and South leaders. The large ethnic divide has been a large contributor to Nigeria's shortcomings. With corrupt political leaders only focused on bringing back prosperity to their respective regions, Nigeria has fallen victim to economic disparity. Much of Nigeria's oil wealth is distributed throughout the South because of the long line of Nigerian presidents who were originally from the South.

To put the ethnic divide and subsequent wealth distribution inequality into perspective, the partitioning of Nigeria must be understood. In the northern part of the country, the Muslim Hausa and the Fulani dominate. In the southwest, the Yoruba dominate, whereas the Igbo (or Ibo) are the dominant group in the southeast, most of which is Christian. Studies show the gap in GDP per capita between the northern and southern parts of the country has widened, with a recent report showing that the GDP per capita in the south is twice that of the north (Akanbi). High income inequality between North, South, Southeast and Southwest has fostered much economic, political, and social instability.

To relieve the tension between the ethnic groups and achieve greater balance and national concord, the capital was moved in 1991 from Lagos to Abuja. While

Lagos is heavily dominated by the Yoruba, Abuja is in the middle of the country, practically on neutral ground between the large ethnic groups. Abuja is a small city with a population of about 2 million, as opposed to about 21 million in Lagos (Campbell). With such a large population of people concentrated in specific areas, there is much despair throughout Nigeria. Much of this despair is linked to the huge income disparity between the poverty-stricken masses and the better-off and affluent Nigerians in the big cities such as Lagos and Abuja. Governmental mismanagement and corruption with politicians who have histories of squandering the nation's wealth has fostered an atmosphere of violence and instability, which has made a full recovery extremely difficult for Nigeria's present leaders.

#### *Violence and crime*

Political corruption has the power to fuel violence and crime as well as religion. Some religious leaders in Nigeria have been found to exaggerate the religious differences to secure financial and political support locally, nationally and internationally. This is problematic because of the large population of Nigerians both at home and in the diaspora who proclaim a specific faith. Corrupt behavior and divisive speech only reinforce the religious and ethnic separations that already exist. This has the possibility to further fuel the economic disparity between regions when both local and national leaders are dissenting. The plague of abject poverty and high rates of unemployment will continue to be in Nigeria's



future if leaders remain steadfast in their efforts to support their own communities.

What is astounding is that Nigerian communities are likely unaware of the human and natural resources the nation is endowed with. This is because a large portion of Nigerians never sees the benefits of the nation's wealth generated from the use of its resources. Pockets of Nigeria, particularly the southern and northern villages, suffer from poverty while major cities such as Abuja and Lagos appear to be flourishing. Because of this perceived disparity between wealth distributions, the gap between rich and poor continues to widen. Those at the bottom still search for avenues out of their economic situation. Segments of the nation complain about their marginalization while others remain favored. Armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom and widespread insecurity persist (Encyclopedia of the Nations). Because of the high unemployment in Nigeria, large numbers of enraged young people can be easily mobilized in conflict situations. Youth militias organized by high school and college dropouts and graduates who are unable to find employment continue to terrorize poor neighborhoods throughout the North and the South. Often, the events may be ignited by people who can profit from the conflict, such as political, ethnic or religious leaders (Carling 16).

Regardless of what triggers the violence and crime, the underlying frustration is almost always related to the struggle over scarce resources (Isaacs). Local authorities are often hesitant to investigate riots, as this could reignite conflicts and raise tensions further. An increase in concern over and the rising demand for

resources such as food, water, land, and oil commonly trigger and intensify violent conflict. The World Bank website references three different sources of violent conflict in relation to resource scarcity. These three include:

- Environmental change, which refers to “a human-induced decline in the quantity or quality of a renewable resource that occurs faster than it is renewed by natural processes”;
- Population growth, which “reduces a resource's per-capita availability by dividing it among more and more people”; and
- Unequal resource distributions, which “concentrates resources in the hands of a few people and subjects the rest to greater scarcity,” and which often results when “property rights that govern resource distribution ... change as a result of large-scale development projects or new technologies that alter the relative values of resources” (Evans 7-8).

A decrease in the quality and quantity of resources, along with inequalities in access to scarce resources, combined with large population growth can easily create tensions among those who are most affected by these dynamics. Resource depletion and population growth can cause unequal resource access, which subsequently creates tension among people and groups of people, often resulting in conflict and violence.

However, violence and crime does not remain at the local level. In addition to local and national crime, organized crime in Nigeria has extensive networks to North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. These crime networks include the production and movement of narcotics as well as humans for labor. The Government of Nigeria does not encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotics, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions. However, corruption does play a major role in drug and human trafficking in Nigeria. Nigeria has anti-corruption laws, but has secured only a few notable convictions, including that of a former National Drug Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) chief. This high level of impunity encourages both narcotic and human trafficking in Nigeria (U.S. Department of State).

#### *Poverty and corruption*

Corruption fuels poverty and poverty fuels corruption. The cycle is as perpetual as it is vicious. Even as the world's eighth largest exporter of crude oil in the world, Nigeria is among the poorest countries in West Africa. It is also one of the countries with the greatest social inequality. The 2010 Human Development Report conducted by the United Nations Development Programme introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which identifies multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health and standard of living. The most recent survey data available for estimating MPI figures for Nigeria were collected in 2008. In Nigeria 54.1 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty

while an additional 17.8 percent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The intensity of deprivation, or the average percentage of deprivation experienced by people living in multidimensional poverty in Nigeria, was 57.3 percent. The country's MPI value, which is the share of the population that is multidimensionally poor, adjusted by the intensity of the deprivations, was 0.31 (Human Development Report 2).

Nigeria's 2012 Human Development Index (HDI), which is a summary measure assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living, is 0.471. This value, included in the annual Human Development Report calculated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is above the average of 0.466 for countries in the low human development group and below the average of 0.475 for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The HDI is an average measure of basic human development achievements in a country. The UNDP notes that, like all averages, the HDI masks inequality in the distribution of human development across the population at the country level. Though Nigeria's HDI value for 2012 is recorded as 0.471, when the value is discounted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.276, a loss of 41.4 percent due to inequality in the distribution of the dimension indices (Human Development Report 3).

Also critical to the economic development of a country is its gender equality. The UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based inequalities in three

dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity.

Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by each gender and attainment at secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labor market participation rate for each gender. The GII shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GII dimensions. Due to a lack of relevant data, the UNDP has not calculated a GII for Nigeria. This would have been a critical component in possibly understanding gender relations and how they affect human development, the opportunity for women to reach their full potential, and how this inequality influences the likelihood of young women and girls being lured into the sex industry.

As a result of the personal development inequalities in Nigerian society as well as the entrenched hierarchical and patriarchal culture, there is a great deal of interaction that takes place in hierarchical personal relationships. Every individual seeks to nurture his or her relationship to his or her contacts higher up in the system. In return, they are rewarded with resources to which only these contacts have access. This happens at many levels so that, in theory, everybody has friends higher up on the socio-economic ladder and friends below. Many Nigerians invest more effort to place their contacts into positions of power and to achieve benefits for those who are already in power than at working politically to change society as a whole (Smith 803). The question is what happens to those who do not have

contacts in high places? Not everyone subscribes to elitism or even has the opportunity to. Yet, this type of corruption remains unchecked. Instead of challenging this somewhat aristocratic system of power through ground-level political activism and social movements, many Nigerians appear to be more interested in looking for a way into the elite club themselves.

With many looking for a way into the elite club at the local, national, and international levels, Nigeria is considered one of the world's most corrupt countries. Transparency International, a non-governmental organization that monitors and publicizes corporate and political corruption in international development, currently scores Nigeria 27/100 in Transparency International's public sector corruption perception index, with 0 being highly corrupt (Transparency International). In 2012, Transparency International ranked Nigeria 35<sup>th</sup> out of all countries in terms of corruption. Nigeria has had an anti-corruption commission since 2000. In February 2003, the Senate passed a new law intended to reinforce this commission, but this was soon perceived as a disguised attempt to undermine the legislation and to protect exposed senators. The Supreme Court declared the law obsolete. The same year, the acting Auditor General was removed from his office after having submitted a report criticizing the Presidential Office and ten ministries for financial irregularities. This dismissal, as well as the attempt at introducing new legislation, was met with fierce objections in Nigeria (Transparency International).

The corruption in Nigeria affects many parts of society and takes some surprising forms. After a mission to Nigeria in 2004, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration reported that false newspaper reports have been made to support asylum applications. In other words, journalists or editors allegedly accept bribes for publishing stories that underpin specific claims of persecution, which are later used as evidence in asylum applications. Many also take advantage of their position in other ways than by taking bribes. This signifies corrupt behavior.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2011 issue paper on the role of corruption in trafficking persons, corrupt behavior ranges from active involvement, such as violating duties, accepting or transferring bribes, facilitating transactions, to passive involvement. Passive involvement can include simply ignoring or failing to follow-up on indicators that corruption may be taking place. All of these instances of corruption can facilitate the practice of trafficking.

The 2005 Council of Europe report titled "Trafficking in Human Beings and Corruption" suggests that opportunities for corruption can also exist within the trafficking chain and the criminal justice chain. The trafficking chain consists of the recruitment of victims, the provision of documentation (identity papers, visas, permits), the transport of victims, which may include border crossing, their exploitation, as well as the laundering of the proceeds of the crime. Corrupt actors within this chain of activities may include police, customs officers,

embassies/consulates, border control authorities, immigration services, other law enforcement agencies, intelligence/security forces, armed forces (national or international), local officials, persons/groups/parties with influence on public officials, as well as private sector actors, such as travel agencies, airlines, the transportation sector, financial institutions, banks, etc. Corrupt acts include ignoring, tolerating, participating in and organizing trafficking in persons, ranging from violation of duties or corruption and involvement in organized crime. The criminal justice chain includes the drafting and adoption of legislation, crime prevention, preliminary investigation, search, seizure and confiscation of proceeds, prosecution, trial and the enforcement of sanctions. Corrupt actors within the criminal justice chain may include parliamentarians, government officials, police, customs border control, immigration services and other law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, investigative judges, intelligence/security forces, local officials, as well as persons/groups or parties with influence on public officials. Acts may include passivity (e.g. ignoring, tolerating, and avoiding action) or actively obstructing investigations, prosecutions and judicial proceedings, revealing and selling information, betraying and altering the course of justice. Lack of awareness, capacities and skills may cause such behavior, which may range from mere violation of duties to corruption and involvement in organized crime (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).

In the process of transfer, transport and in general in the early stages of the trafficking journey, bribery and abuse of power are the most common forms of



corruption reported, such as crossing of borders without any checks or with the cooperation of airline staff and visa officials. Victims often mention having been able to go through immigration checks where an official appeared to be complicit (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).

In comparison to ground level, disorderly behavior assisting trafficking, high-level organized trafficking also requires corruption in order to thrive. Corrupt behavior can occur at the governmental level or criminal justice level. Organized trafficking is most successful when the corruption is systemic. Analyzing the likelihood of human trafficking through the assessment of both poverty *and* corruption within a country questions the widely accepted hypothesis that poverty is the main root cause for human trafficking.

### *Gender and Sexuality*

If poverty is the main root for cause for trafficking, it is not surprising that a country as economically divided as Nigeria has such a prominent history of human trafficking from its poorest states. In addition to its economic divisions, a country as diverse as Nigeria is also characterized by great variations in gender roles and sexual culture. This is important to relate to poverty, as poverty disproportionately affects individuals based on gender. According to the Global Poverty Project, women make up half of the world's population and represent a staggering 70% of the world's poor. Women's lives are a litany of discrimination and obstacles that get in the way of achieving their basic needs such as healthcare,

education and employment when living in poverty. Women in poverty face gross inequalities ranging from poor education to poor nutrition to vulnerability and low-paying employment. This sequence of discrimination has made women's livelihoods increasingly difficult. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, and produce half of the world's food, but earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. On average, women earn half of what men earn.

Because of this difference in earnings, informal employment is a greater source of employment for women than for men. The reality of the informal economy for women is starker. While it can offer life-changing opportunities to earn money, the low pay and lack of social protection makes women vulnerable and open to exploitation (The Global Poverty Project). In Nigeria this is a common case. The Nigeria Delta is one of the most impoverished regions of Nigeria. Here, women experience extreme vulnerability in terms of poverty. Because of this, women and young girls search for avenues out of their unfortunate economic situation, including sex work. Economic despair is a main cause of early involvement in sex work. In the area around the Niger Delta, from where most women are recruited for trafficking, it is more or less acceptable for single women to be sexually active, oftentimes for economic gain. Girls will often have their first intercourse at a very young age. What is important to note here is that sexual intercourse at a young age is not culturally acceptable in Nigerian society. Conventional Nigerian culture and religion frown upon sex before marriage. Traditionally, sex is

perceived as an act between two married individuals. Open conversation on sex and sexuality, at least within the family environment, is not at all common.

Researchers Bilkisu Yusuf and Rakiya Booth describe the impact of religion and family on sexuality in Nigeria in a report titled “Religious and Ethnic Factors Affecting Sexuality.” Religion is situated in a specific human context in a concrete, determined geographical space, historical moment, and social milieu. Members of a religion share certain collective dimensions - social, economic, political, cultural, educational, military, etc. Religion is therefore closely linked and interrelated with all the dimensions of the life of a community, they explain. Because religion is part of a society, it follows that anything that affects people’s lives will be affected by their religion. Hence, religion affects sexuality.

Nigerian society is dominated by two religions: Islam and Christianity. They are the main source of Nigerian religious value systems, which affect sexual attitude and behavior. Christianity, for instance, expects men and women to hold in high esteem the religious value of sexual purity. Girls are expected to be virgins at the time of marriage. Islam allows female children to be given in marriage before the age of puberty. These practices ensure that the female child is a virgin at marriage (Esiet, Esiet, Yusuf, Booth).

Because of the prominent religious and traditional culture of silence on sexuality, and condemnation of sex before marriage, there has been little or no structured

way of teaching young Nigerians about sexuality. Nevertheless, sexuality remains an integral part of identity on both personal and social levels, and like gender, is socially constructed. Nigerian women in popular culture, especially in popular music, for example, play an active role in representation and naming. Co-Founder and Executive Director of the African Women's Development Fund Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi highlights her concern about the inability of popular culture in Nigeria to facilitate a progressive agenda for Nigerian women. Instead, in almost all forms of popular culture, women are derided, ridiculed, objectified, or rigidly categorized—in accordance with male power and control—as mothers, wives, good-time girls, and at best, as romanticized queens and goddesses. Representations of women in popular culture are a direct reflection of how they are perceived in society. Popular culture plays its own role in constructing sexuality, and the more control the media has, the more dominant the representations become (Adeleye-Fayemi 1).

Gender researcher Dr. Chimaraoke Otutubikey Izugbara of the University of Uyo, Nigeria, further argues that sexuality is more of a human-made idea than a natural one. Izugbara attempts to grasp the socio-cultural dynamics of sexual identity formation in contemporary Nigerian society. People do not become men and women in the “sterile environment of the womb” (Izugbara 7a). Izugbara affirms that people become men and women in specific social and cultural contexts. In Nigeria, the social production of masculinity and femininity is often begun at home through socialization practices, which aim to instill specific personalities

and identities into male and female children. The male child is often the preferred child in many Nigerian cultures, and several couples go to the extent of consulting oracles to ensure that they will give birth to a male child (Ejikeme 8).

University of Jos, Nigeria Professor of Clinical Psychology and Social Work Gray Goziem Ejikeme concedes to this same notion, highlighting that the preference for male children in African countries is the backdrop against which sex, sexuality and gender roles in African societies are generated. The socialization of the male and female child tends to be tailored to produce them as different persons with different potential, capabilities, and constitutions. While male children are socialized to see themselves as future heads of households, breadwinners, and owners (in the literal sense, sometimes) of their wives and children, female children are taught that a good woman must be an obedient, submissive, meek, and a humble housekeeper (Asanga 15). These socialization experiences inscribe superiority into maleness and masculinity, and inferiority into femaleness and femininity.

I view the agenda of cultural socialization to be that of locating men and women in specific places in (hetero) sexuality and endorsing the belief that the natural order of things is for men to control women. This inherently privileges men and masculinity. Being a man is equated with autonomy (i.e. the freedom to explore, experience and experiment) and femininity (i.e. danger, vulnerability, and weakness). Nigerian culture frames men as having a naturally stronger sexual

drive and firmer control of their sexuality than women. We speak of women in terms of shame, lack of interest in sexual matters, and as the 'other' to be conquered and demystified by the domineering active male.

However, the role of Nigerian women has not always been this docile. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* chronicles that in pre-colonial Nigeria, women played a major role in social and economic activities. Division of labor was along gender lines, and women controlled occupations such as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making, and cooking. Moreover, land was communally owned, and women had access to it through their husbands or parents. Although a man was the head of the household in a patrilineal system, a system in which an individual belongs to his or her father's lineage, older women had control of the labor of younger family members (Falola).

Women were also central to trade. Among the Yoruba, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of "iyalode," a position of great privilege and power.

In politics, women were not as powerless as contemporary literature tends to portray them. The basic unit of political organization was the family. The common matri-focal arrangement (mother-headed family unit) allowed a woman to gain considerable authority over her children. Power and privileges in a

household were also based on age and gender, allowing elder women to have a voice on many issues. Because the private and public arenas were intertwined, a woman's ability to control resources and people in a household was at the same time an exercise in public power. She could use food production to gain respect. She could control her children and influence men through this power. She could evoke the power of the spirit or gods in her favor. Or she could simply withdraw and use the kitchen as her own personal domicile for interaction with her colleagues, friends, and children. It was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the influence and privileges of women were threatened. Patriarchy, combined with colonial changes, altered gender relations. Male chiefs collaborated with the British colonial administration in taxing and governing. The position of female chiefs declined in importance, and so on. Women were henceforth pushed to the background (Falola).

Because of this history, it is important to understand the dynamics of gender and sexuality as well as the complexity of gendered experience throughout the course of time. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the present day examples of gender and sexuality in Nigeria are unique to this period in time. It would therefore be safe to say that in this sense, gender and sexuality are social constructs.

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life. It encompasses sex, gender, identities, roles, sexual orientation, and eroticism, and is expressed

through thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors and practices. Izugbara suggests the prevailing codes of sexuality and sexual conduct in contemporary Nigeria are socially produced and fed by oppressive patriarchal subjectivities and ideologies that try to instill a sense of what is normal, “sexually-speaking,” for all. She outlines three central, oppressive, male-biased discursive subjectivities with familiar traits that have a tendency to dominate the contemporary patriarchal Nigerian society. These are 1) homophobia (i.e. supporting the hatred and fear of men who step out of or challenge traditional male roles), 2) penis-centrality (i.e. glorifying and idolizing the objectification of women and their body), 3) male-privileging (i.e. encouraging the ideology of double standard in which males feel morally and physically edified by multiple sexual encounters while women are held as morally and physically tarnished by the same) (Izugbara 2).

Sexual deviance does not go without shame, especially if the sexual deviant is a woman, and Nigerian society is no exception to this “rule.” Men and women do not experience the same criticism in virtually all realms of society. This is because of the entrenchment of patriarchy and penis-central discourse. Penis-central discourse ultimately dictates where the power lies. In terms of sex and sexuality, a woman’s pleasure is giving the man what he wants and how he wants it. This means she has to curb her own desire if it would threaten men. Women who fail to align to this patriarchal order are cast aside as nymphomaniacs and whores. By centralizing the penis, sexuality discourses in Nigeria marginalize women’s genitals, sexual desire, and pleasure and make them to appear evil. This is where



women's lack of autonomy, their inferiority and unworthiness are embodied. Women then become the 'unimportant' other because they do not possess the penis (Isherwood 273).

Izugbara explains that the Bible is awash with male-privileging narratives. The Christian God is depicted as a (jealous) man, and men fought wars and were prophets, apostles, disciples, elders, and deacons. In the Bible, men are depicted as the natural possessors of rationality, analytical skills, and critical thinking.

Christian discourse celebrates forms of sexuality and sexual practices tied with patriarchal forms of marriage, family, and gender relations. Christ, the head of the church, is a man. The anti-Christ is, however, a woman, a whore. Many people (kings and common men) have drunk her wine of seduction. She is depicted as a sacrilege. She is unholy because she has broken the rules of patriarchy. She is framed as impure because she asserts her sexuality. She does what she likes with herself and her body. Indeed, she has refused to be held down and dominated by man. Here, the adulterous woman is framed as the idolatrous woman. Her punishment is hurtful enough. No woman is expected to challenge patriarchal domination. She is thus flung into the bottomless pit to be burnt with fire and brimstone (Revelations 17: 1-18, McColley).

Similar to what is described in the Bible, in male-dominated societies, women are often viewed as second-class citizens and, as such, they remain at the receiving

end of the acts of discrimination, contempt, neglect, victimization (including sexual) and other forms of human rights violations. The fact that some of these acts are founded on the traditions, culture and structures of Nigerian society is somewhat disturbing. In a patriarchal society, women stand to be subjugated and dominated by men. Their participation in political, economic, religious, and any other power-centered affairs is highly restricted. Researcher Austin Obinna Ezejiolor in his work *Patriarchy, Marriage and the Rights of Widows in Nigeria* explains these restrictions take many forms such as 1) cultural ideology that explicitly devalues women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products and their social milieu less prestige than is accorded to men and the male correlates; 2) symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and 3) social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside (Ezejiolor 142-144). The social, political, and economic restrictions and limitations imposed on women in Nigeria and in many other nations can be both religious and secular in scope.

In traditional Nigerian society, there is little separation between the laws governing secular and spiritual spheres. What the gods say is accepted by society and forms the norms of the community; they cannot be challenged, especially not by women. This perceived divine ordinance of male dominance forms the ultimate basis of patriarchal entrenchment in Nigerian culture. The siege of

patriarchy encompasses all spheres in Nigerian society including practices like female genital mutilation, child marriage, widow inheritance, rape, and polygamy. Talk about sex is considered immoral; sexual issues are not open to discussion. This secrecy surrounding sexual relations, combined with the religious and cultural expectations that subjugate women, largely explains women's vulnerability. Women's susceptibility is correlated to the religious and cultural demands of society with regard to sexual relations. Both indigenous religions and Islam allow polygamy, and women cannot expect fidelity from their husbands. Even Christianity, while emphasizing marital fidelity and monogamy, expects the submission of women to their husbands. Discussions of sexuality are considered indecent for girls and women. Throughout their lives, women are expected to bear suffering and humiliation in silence (Isiramen).

As with all heavily patriarchal societies, the expectations of men and women are vastly different when it comes to sexual relations. While for women to engage in extramarital relationships is taboo, men who do so are considered virile. To prove their virility and power, Nigerian men often engage in extramarital sex (Isiramen). For women to do so it is considered unthinkable and there are grave punishments for women who commit such acts.

Yet despite the codes of conduct indoctrinated into women, there are many who chose to take the risks to live the life of a sex worker, mainly due to economic pressure. Consequently, there has been a gradual shift in Nigerian society and

perceptions of sexuality. In recent years, as a nation, Nigeria has begun to embrace prostitution, giving it another name, “making ends meet.” Not long ago Nigerian women were shamed and ostracized for using their bodies in the pursuit of monetary gain. But now there has been a visible change. Young women are beginning to refer to their sexuality as a tool with which they can “make ends meet,” often qualifying that they lack other resources or avenues to achieve these ends. Their perspective reflects a large-scale transformation in the national psyche (Isiramen) Nigerian women and girls, mostly at the lower ranks of the socio-economic ladder, have discovered new ways to survive against the political and economic systems that have not worked in their favor. The utilization or manipulation (depending on how you analyze it) of gender and sexuality with sex work is one method through which women have chosen to prosper.

### *Intersectionality*

Gender and sexuality are only two aspects of sex work that affect women. Two other equally important aspects required in the discourse are race and class. Gender, sexuality, race, and class are four prime factors that contribute to an individual’s likelihood to experience discrimination. Within the sex labor industry, sex workers experience intersectional discrimination where a person is subject to layers of discrimination based on different aspects of his/her identity (Dasvarma and Loh). The study of intersectional discrimination seeks to capture the multidimensional, interconnected and contingent nature of individual women’s identity. The experience of oppression is not singular or fixed but

derives from the relationship within the interlocking systems of power. Women who work in the sex industry are underneath a system of power that “radiates from the ‘dominocentric’ (favoring modes of domination and exploitation of others) grouping” of their origin or host country (Carroll 2-3).

Researcher Eneze Modupe traces the origin of intersectionality back to black feminists’ analysis of the black women’s rights movement in the U.S. They analyzed the socioeconomic situation of black women by identifying the specificity and interrelatedness of different categories of social differentiation. Baye further references Crenshaw (1989) who coined the concept of intersectionality while considering the intersection of class, “race” and gender. Researchers accept the definition of intersectionality as the interaction between gender, race, social practices, institutional arrangements, cultural ideologies and other categories of difference interfering in individual lives that make up the lived realities of people. These mutual interactions cannot be separated.

Intersectionality has been applauded for making more visible the various intersecting factors that affect the well-being of black women. Intersectionality addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist’s scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women (Baye 10).

My interactions with a few French men as well as a few Italian men during my travels abroad hinted that darker-skinned women likely have a *unique* representation abroad. I quickly learned that a large population of sex workers in

France and Italy were African, specifically, Nigerian. When I traveled to Paris with my cousin, I also learned that most of the Nigerian sex workers were from Edo State. I found this puzzling, though with my own personal knowledge of the economic and social conditions of Edo state through relatives, I began to understand that there were a number of dynamics at work. I concluded that intersectionality is a tool I needed to use to understand the complex relationship between disadvantage, occupation, and privileges expected from migration, as Baye did in her research. In her studies she found that the majority of Nigerian youth see Europe as paradise and coming to Europe is both an advantage and a privilege. Due to their limited options available at home in regards to political economy, advocates of women's independence recognize that some women migrants see migration for sex work as an opportunity for themselves to improve their standard of living, provide for their families, and become more self-reliant. The belief that destination countries have many more opportunities to offer than the home country will likely change their social position motivates women to migrate. Corruption, unequal distribution of resources and globalization all tend to increase the number of migrants to places where they hope to develop their human capabilities (Baye 12).

As women aspire to reach their full potential, there are many consequences along the way. In states where sex work is not criminalized, there exists societal stigmatization of sex workers. Evidence proves that in some states, prostitutes are characterized as the deviant minority because they do not conform to the idealized

image of women as passive, monogamous and faithful. This demonstrates that even where sex work is legal, it is still perceived socially as a deviant behavior, which severely places the workers in experiences with an intersection of discrimination through their experience of employment and gender. This is further complicated where sex workers are also of an “other” category relating to identity aspects such as sexuality and ethnicity, as mentioned earlier (Carroll 5).

In a society where nearly everyone faces obstacles to achieving their social and economic goals, women's sexual agency offers a number of desired benefits, including opportunities to continue higher education, access to employment, and the ability to help family. The challenge that these young women face is that even as they are able to utilize their sexual desirability to meet educational, economic, and social goals, they must eventually “navigate the marriage market,” where society has different expectations for what they want in a woman. Igbo society expects a wife to be faithful to her husband and devoted to her children. For most men, the idea that a young woman has been a free sexual agent, utilizing her body for economic purposes, or even just for her own pleasure, contradicts the ideal image of a wife. In addition, the increasingly shared expectation that marriage should be based on romantic love is somewhat in conflict with a more strategic notion of women's sexuality. As a consequence, young unmarried women are “traversing a complex landscape before marriage, as they seek some sexual partners for purely economic purposes while also keeping an eye out for a love match, or at least a man who could compatibly confer the status of wife and

mother” (Smith 129). These women and girls often find themselves at a crossroads. Do they pay attention to society’s conventional expectations of womanhood or can they use autonomy and agency to their own advantage, even if it goes against these expectations? What conditions motivate people to enter the sex work industry? And what does it mean to have sex work as a last resort?

### **Chapter 3: To Europe**

#### *Push and pull factors*

Researchers have found that trafficking and the decision to enter the commercial sex industry is largely influenced by deepening poverty and a deterioration in living conditions of persons. These conditions are not unique to Nigeria, or sub-Saharan Africa. What is unique about the developing world is that over three billion people, roughly half of the world’s population, live on less than \$2.50 a day. Accounting for the bulk of this deficit are the poor populations in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Shah). Poverty in sub-Saharan Africa forces many young persons into sex work. The declining fortune of Africa’s economies is a strong factor that compels families into encouraging young girls to go into sex trafficking. Out of desperation, young persons risk everything to find their way to rich countries in the North with the assistance of trafficking syndicates.

Researchers also cite factors such as rural-urban migration, unemployment, poor living conditions, peer influence and the collapse of the family institution. Within the Nigerian context, the primary causes of trafficking in women are unemployment and the low socio-economic status of women, especially in parts



of Edo and Delta states where it thrives (Attoh 167-168). The disparity in Nigeria is only exacerbated by its rapidly growing population disproportionately affecting women.

From a socio-economic perspective, Nigerian women are today proving their equality with their male counterparts both within Nigeria and internationally. Young women have discovered their own lucrative business in Europe, as have men. However, when such girls fall into the hands of the syndicates on human trafficking, they are trapped once they are promised a secure and meaningful job. And once money is made, no one asks the manner through which it is made. In Nigerian society, women are also enticed by offers of employment abroad as dancers, bar-tenders, hostesses or au pairs and end up, sold in debt, on the pavements of some unknown country. Even those who know that they are heading into prostitution do not anticipate the violence and abuse that lay ahead. They are also often misled about the conditions under which they will have to work.

It is important to know that in Nigeria today, young girls, who are the majority of school dropouts, have little to no hope of securing decent and well-paying jobs. There is a certain level at which parents can no longer afford to support to their young, which is why it is easy to find a good number of young girls particularly roaming about the street in search of means for day-to-day survival. Many of these young girls come from very poor families and are expected to take care of their parents, siblings, and other household members.

Most young girls are lured into migration to Europe as soon as they have the slightest hint of any kind of available job employment. Some would not mind taking to the street as hustlers or red-light girls as long as they receive cash to remit back home to Nigeria. In her study, Professor and Director at Njebuamaka Cooperation Europa Eloka C.P. Okanga Nwolisa spoke with young female students who questioned, "What is wrong in Akwuna/Ashawo (prostitute), especially in a country where one's identity is unknown? There is nothing wrong about it in as much as one makes hard currency out of it," they believe. "After all, it is better than armed robbery and all other dubious means of making fast money" (7).

In her thesis titled *Experiences of Nigerian Trafficked Women; Voices and Perspectives from Italy*, researcher Eneze Modupe-Oluwa Baye found that only few sets of women who migrated to Italy in the late 80s and early 90s migrated voluntarily. These women (though very few) enriched themselves and when they returned to Edo state, they invested and acquired properties. This made other women desire to migrate, and parents appealed for their children to be taken to Italy so they could liberate themselves and their families from the claws of poverty. However, the desire for an improved quality of life made them fall captive to traffickers. Some victims of trafficking, after repaying the debt their sponsors incurred, in turn recruited women who also desired to migrate to secure a future for themselves. Baye concedes that trafficking was well established

before 1999, but it gained more attention from the government and media in 1999 with the criminalization and media-shaming of sex work.

Though many Nigerian women are involved in the global human trafficking enterprise to many parts of the world, the major cause of such engagement can be located from the fact that unemployment in Nigeria has in recent years been at an alarming level. Researcher Eloka Nwolisa approaches the topic from a sociocultural- anthropological perspective. She describes that the migration of Nigerian women can be seen as an aspect of the modern characteristics: the gradual disintegration of certain social and cultural institutions in Nigeria and emphasis on 'fast money' to the detriment of the social institutions. The family structure has also been drastically affected in the sense that the nuclear family instead of the extended family (popular in African culture) has been encouraged through modernization.

Emphasis on adopting the modern family system, a nuclear family with the male head of the household, was encouraged and highlighted especially through Christianity. The traditional Nigerian extended family structure where relatives live in the same household has been drastically "destroyed" by these modern characteristics. Consequently, all dependency models within the structure are gradually collapsing since certain support can no longer be obtained for such tradition (Nwolisa 8). Nigerians are no longer capable of supporting relatives outside of their immediate family.

Nwolisa concludes that this has created a detrimental impact on many young women who depended on this tradition for financial support. In addition to this, the deplorable economic condition in the country has heightened and jeopardized any further attempt in assisting other members outside nuclear structure. The young women who can no longer get financial support are often prone to migration as a necessary condition for personal as well as for their own household survival. They are willing to undertake any available job especially when they have been assisted to migrate into Europe, where they believe there are chances of building a better life. Based on this, it is easier to understand the dilemmas faced by many Nigerian young women in taking-up prostitution as an individual means of realizing their migratory desires (12).

#### *Hopes and aspirations*

These migratory desires include the hopes to attain material wealth. To many, emigration also provides opportunities to obtain status symbols such as houses or cars. The financial crisis makes many people regard emigration as the best means to achieve such aims. Thus, despite the difficult situation in Nigeria, many do not wish to leave the country for good, but want to go abroad and make money to ensure themselves and their family a better life in Nigeria afterwards.

Financial hardship has been the primary 'push' factor and perceived financial gain the primary 'pull' factor in explaining why many women enter the sex industry. Local patriarchal customs such as incest, female circumcision, forced early

marriages, forced sex-work or bonded labor, domestic violence, marital rape and financial instability also push many women into sex-work.

Though local patriarchal customs tend to have women at the disadvantage, it is important to note that men are not the only syndicates for human trafficking. Contrary to popular belief, traffickers are both male and female. Women, however, have played principal roles as barons because of their capital and connections, which they have acquired through participating in the sex trade. Men are their auxiliaries as intermediaries, recruiters and enforcers of disciplinary action. In Nigeria, many women traffickers and barons were formerly sex-workers. Their roles indicate how the global economy has been systematically structured to ensure that the exploited replicate patterns of exploitation in order to earn a living. Under-resourced police, border/immigration officials and state officials, weak law enforcement and porous borders ensure that trafficking flourishes. In urban centers, commercial sex bureaus and trade have “burgeoned because of this laxity” (Olaniyi 47).

#### *Trafficking and the local community*

So what does this mean for the local community? How have lax migratory laws, flawed security systems and corrupt political officials impacted the livelihood of the average Nigerian? To no surprise, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Nigerians increasingly lost faith in the government and sought a way out. The most important causes were the financial breakdown, oppressive military regimes,

regional disparities and differences, and the indifference of political leaders towards the suffering of the people. Thousands of Nigerians resorted to migration. This period of time was characterized by a strong demand for unskilled labor.

A sense of hopelessness among Nigerians has caused many to resort to any extreme on the road to riches. Nigerians have been willing to take the risks that come with gaining a foothold in a rich country, be it in Europe, Saudi Arabia or the United States. However, the immigration policies of western countries are what have made this dream unrealistic for most.

There are three roads to Europe for Nigerians who wish to emigrate: a residence permit, a visitor's visa or illegal entry:

- ***Entry with possibility of extended or permanent residence permit on the basis of studies, work or family reunification:*** This is a possibility accessible only to very few. With the exception of quota arrangements for limited immigration to Spain and Italy, it is nearly impossible for Nigerians to settle in Europe only on the basis of wanting to work. However, as the number of Nigerians in Europe has grown, more have been able to emigrate from Nigeria on the basis of family reunification with family members residing in Europe.

- ***Entry with a visitor's visa:*** This does not initially offer the possibility of an extended or permanent stay in Europe, but may be used to gain a foothold. For

instance, Many Africans in southern Europe arrived on a visitor's visa, remained illegally in the country after the visa expired, and later obtained a residence permit through amnesties. The emigration pressure has led to a steady increase in the number of visa applications at the embassies of western countries, even after many embassies moved from Lagos to Abuja. However, most Nigerians have only limited possibilities to have their application for a visitor's visa to the Schengen area accepted. First of all, Nigeria is considered a risk country with many potential asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. Nigerians are one of only 11 nationalities that must also have a transit visa to pass through an airport in the Schengen area. Secondly, the social and financial situation in the country causes many Nigerians to be subject to the provisions restricting the issuing of visitors' visas to persons of limited resources.

- ***Illegal entry:*** This means entering Europe by circumventing border controls. Persons entering Europe in this way are instantly in an illegal situation unless they apply for asylum (Carling 21).

The perception of sex workers from a human rights perspective will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **Chapter 4: Human Rights**

To no surprise, sex work has been met with prejudice and stereotypes. This stigmatization has had a major influence on the lives, working conditions, and the

health of sex workers. Traditionally, prostitution has been coupled with the notions of trafficking and slavery. However, in the past two decades, ideas about forced and voluntary prostitution and sex workers' rights have entered the discourse. From a feminist perspective, the debate about choice in prostitution has been particularly challenging.

The belief that women have historically been—and still are—victims of both direct and subtle forms of male oppression is not debated. Feminist beliefs do, however, vary widely on what is the most effective way to end this oppression. At the 1997 International Conference on Prostitution at Cal State University, Northridge, Sarah Bloomberg made the distinction that the practice of prostitution in society is thought by radical feminists to reinforce and perpetuate this climate of oppression. Radicals and liberals, however, are divided on the role of prostitution, seeing it in a range of perspectives from that of an ordinary business transaction to an activity that degrades all women, she explains. Bloomberg further details that the difference of opinion on whether prostitutes are victims—and should be protected by eliminating the source of prostitution—or should be considered free agents pursuing their legitimate economic interests should not be ignored.

Traditionally, prostitution is viewed as forced objectification of women by men, and it is not widely discussed that some voluntarily enter the sex work industry. The reason behind this is that prostitution typically occurs under circumstances



that are unfavorable to the woman. The average age of prostitution is 12 to 14 and the circumstances are usually deplorable. Those recruited abroad are almost never told the full truth of what awaits them, and there is often no quitting. The idea of prostitution is thought to involve women in the streets working under abysmal conditions and involved in “survival sex,” selling sex out of a dire need or to support a drug habit. Some are runaways with no other options, others are kidnapping victims, but there exist some women who do have other life options, but still choose to enter the sex work industry.

“Over the past decade, mounting public and political attention has been directed toward the ‘traffic in women’ as a dangerous manifestation of global gender inequalities,” says associate professor of Women’s Studies and Sociology at Barnard College, Columbia University, Elizabeth Bernstein. “Media accounts have rehearsed similar stories of the abduction, transport, and forced sexual labor of women and girls whose poverty and desperation render them amenable to easy victimization in first- and third-world cities” (Bernstein 3).

Headlines more often than not insist that migrant women who sell sex are trafficked. It is not imagined that one would opt to sell sex because of the popular idea that it is an act done in the privacy of one’s home and therefore migrants must be forced to do it. If this is the only accepted relationship between sex and human beings, it is easier to think that women from other cultures are poor, vulnerable objects who passively experience exploitation by men. Migrant

workers sell sex every day around the world to customers of different cultures. Sex trafficking headlines claim that migrant women who sell sex are being abused without regard to their actual feelings toward the act. They are often defined as sexually vulnerable and in need of protection. However, it can be misleading and inaccurate to make such generalizations about sex work and sex workers.

*Women's rights and labor rights as human rights*

In *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition*, York University Social Science professor Kamala Kempadoo and University of Sussex professor Jo Doezema emphasize that there is such a thing as voluntary sex labor and the use of the term "sex worker" gives these workers the personal agency they exercise. The term "sex worker" suggests that prostitution is not viewed as an identity but as an occupation and a source of income. Sex labor must be considered the same as various other methods humans practice to sustain themselves. The light has been shed on prostitution as the right of a woman to control and use her body as she sees fit.

Distinguishing between voluntary and forced prostitution with respect to the rights of women to self-determination is one of the many issues raised in the discourse on prostitution today. The distinction between voluntary and forced prostitution has largely replaced the abolitionist model of prostitution in international discourse. Across the globe, prostitutes, exotic dancers, and other sex laborers are organizing for their rights. They are fighting to keep brothels

open, challenging stigmas and stereotypes, and exposing corruption within the sex industry.

Despite the marginality and vulnerability of global sex workers, the notion of sex workers as “victims” only is being rejected. The right of subjectivity and personal agency is too often unrecognized. The recent and current discourse surrounding the idea of voluntary sex work underlines agency and the resistance and contestation of oppressive and exploitative structures (Aulette et al. 130). Sex-workers’ rights advocates wish to position sex workers as actors in the global arena, persons capable of making choices and decisions that lead to transformations of consciousness and changes in everyday life. These sex-workers’ rights advocates reject theories that deny agency to sex workers and identify them as passive objects in the act (131).

Nevertheless, the contradictions of victimizing and un-victimizing prostitution should not be overlooked. Recognizing that prostitutes are both victims and agents advances the debate exposing that the situation of sex work is much more complex than simply feeling victimized. There can be violence, exploitation, and substance abuse in prostitutes’ lives as well as autonomy, free will, and job satisfaction, all depending on who the prostitute is, where she works and how much control she has over her work. (131)

What is also important in the realm of sex work is the intersectionality of inequality as mentioned earlier in this paper that has been put into place and reinforced by our social systems. This intersectionality of inequality links gender, social class, and race to sex work inequality. Furthermore, this intersectionality takes place in the context of a global political economy. Globalization has created a global labor force for every industry, including sex work. Some people who are trafficked as sex workers choose to be sex workers and choose to migrate, but their choices are seriously constrained by the poverty and desperation they find in countries with few economic opportunities. All the while, many are trafficked in order to be exploited against their will. These trafficking victims have neither chosen to be sex workers, nor have they chosen to move to other nations.

Research shows that prostitution dominates, degrades, and exploits people fundamentally because they are women in insecure socio-economic positions, and even more so if they are women of color. This does not, however, take into account the proportion of sex workers that are men. Men sex workers are also typically given more agency than women and are subsequently less likely to be as victimized and viewed as vulnerable as women in the industry. Prostitution is largely defined, organized, and regulated on the basis of gender. Most suppliers of sexual services are women, while most people who manage or buy sexual services from prostitutes are men. Within this context, being female seems to increase vulnerability to prostitution. Female prostitutes are regulated more than their male

customers and prostitution laws and policy appear to be stricter against the women who sell sexual services than the men who buy it.

The connection between social class and prostitution is clear in the preconception that prostitution is a means for financial ends. The majority of prostitutes simply seek economic survival. Environmental and social-class constraints including poverty, unemployment, a lack of educational opportunities, and the unavoidable presence of brothels and strip clubs appear to “push” poor women into prostitution. In this context, it is difficult and somewhat unreasonable to argue that these environments provide any real alternatives to prostitution for survival. Social class also influences the punishments on prostitutes, as street workers are more likely to be arrested for prostitution than high-end call girls who typically serve high-end people indoors. As discrimination based on socio-economic standing often relating to race persists, the struggle for the right to sex work also continues.

Prostitution is now identified as a transnational issue requiring global solutions in relation to its regulation and legislation, but the question of what constitutes a “properly feminist” response remains a matter of dispute. Ongoing conflicts within feminist circles over the meanings of sex and sexuality for women, combined with the United Nations’ acknowledgment of women’s rights as human rights, have produced two divergent conceptions of prostitution as a legitimate target of governmental intervention.

Expanding on the UN's recognition of gender discrimination and violence as issues that stem from and reinforce the secondary status of women, NGOs associated with the feminist abolitionist lobby contend that prostitution constitutes a form of violence against women and a violation of human rights. As a result, they are lobbying with the UN for nations to work towards the eradication of prostitution by decriminalizing and providing support for women in prostitution while criminalizing those who create the demand for, and profit from, the sexual exploitation of others. On the other hand, endorsing the platform of prostitutes' rights from an abolitionist, prohibitory perspective violates the human right of women to control their own bodies, lives and work. Consequently, there exists a counter-lobby for nations to recognize all forms of voluntary prostitution, by decriminalizing consensual commercial sexual practices, and placing the "sex sector" under the jurisdiction of commercial labor, as opposed to criminal laws.

The voluntary versus forced prostitution dichotomy has had its adverse effects, such as creating a division between sex workers. The strongest division, as Kempadoo mentions, is between the forced prostitute being viewed as a victim and thereby being exonerated from sexual wrongdoing, and the "whore" who, because of her transgression, deserves whatever she gets. Though distinguishing between the two is a radical and resistive attack on traditional models of approaching the topic, it has been inverted to reinforce the system that abuses and stereotypes sex workers (Kempadoo, Jozema).

The campaign for sex workers' rights must begin with debunking the myths surrounding prostitution and women's sexuality. Claiming that prostitution could be a choice is a major step in restoring the agency and subjectivity of each individual worker. Recognizing that these women have a right to survival and self-determination is a milestone in understanding the reality of sex workers. Still, this new dichotomous model must be used with caution, as it threatens to limit and simplify a very complex situation. The discourse must go further beyond that.

### **Chapter 5: Considering Sex Work, A Personal Analysis**

#### *Legal dimension*

It has been almost 30 years since the sex workers' rights advocates of the International Committee for Prostitutes' Rights linked their strategies for change to the human rights framework. They demanded the protection of sex workers' human rights. These rights include freedom of speech, travel, immigration, and work, among others. The sex worker rights movement began with a goal to offset discrimination against prostitutes. I believe the discourse on the human rights-based approach for sex workers and their supporting organizations is necessary. It is necessary to evaluate and understand the perspective of sex workers as not only human beings, but also human beings with legally protected rights to the work of their choice.

A human rights-based framework would be useful to develop strategies to reduce discrimination against sex workers. In organizing to shield the rights of sex workers, the strategies must address not only the more obvious civil and political rights, but also economic and social rights, including the right to work. However, many sex workers are not even aware of the social injustice they experience. In some places, “human rights” is a concept unknown to sex workers. In both developed and developing countries, legal education among sex workers is not always common and little funding exists for rights-based activism. Funds are usually allocated toward health promotion to reduce the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and infections. Consequently, few people in the sex workers’ rights movement have training in the principles and practice of human rights and international law.

Nevertheless, it is imperative that sex workers’ activists continue to push, be it at the local, national, or international level, for support for human rights programs and participation in major conferences. Sex workers and sex workers’ activists must be present in the discussion of their basic human rights. It may be that few recognize sex work as either legitimate labor or voluntarily chosen work. Through the moral eyes of the international community, sex work is coerced, degrading, and a form of violence against women. Yet on the other hand, sex workers’ rights activists argue that the legal frameworks surrounding prostitution are what infringes upon sex workers’ freedom and allow others to discriminate against them.



I believe the language in the legal frameworks somewhat reinforces sex work discrimination. Dominant legal documents addressing transnational crime tend to use the expression “trafficked persons” and sometimes “forced prostitution.” This type of language tends to over-emphasize the criminal aspect of trafficking and may also misleadingly criminalize the act of prostitution. This is problematic because prostitution is not a criminal act everywhere in the world. It is perfectly legal in some places. Linking the word “prostitution” to the commonly used term “victim” in these transnational crime documents further perpetuates the belief that sex work or prostitution is involuntary.

Defining prostitution as a human rights abuse also creates problems. This may allow governments to abolish the sex industry and prosecute those who participate in it. This undermines sex workers’ rights. Sex workers’ rights are in fact workers’ rights, which are human rights. Presently, it appears that not many NGOs and human rights organizations understand the nature of sex work and are not fully prepared to defend it in the legal arena.

### *Moral dimension*

From a moral perspective, sex work has been criticized and stigmatized in traditional Western society. The problem here is that this is the lens through which sex work is analyzed at the international level. Traditional Western values have a tendency to prevail in human rights discourse. Society has many conceptions about prostitution. The act of prostitution is defined as the act of

engaging in sexual intercourse for money. Prostitution raises a few ethical issues, resulting from the thought of degrading one's body through offering sexual service. When considering the degrading element in prostitution, the moral argument centers on the belief that it objectifies and/or dehumanizes women.

Western society rejects the notion of selling one's body for material gain, calling it immoral. It is believed to spread diseases and demolish the traditional values of companionship and love. The conventional belief toward sex is that it should be between two people that know and love each other, not between two strangers.

According to Emmanuel Kant's Deontology theory, the degrading of a woman's body resulting from prostitution would be considered immoral. Prostitution, by definition, violates the second form of the categorical imperative by allowing men to use a woman purely as a "means to an end" (Odze). Accepting prostitution as morally or ethically wrong because it entails the utilization of one's body for the benefit of another completely denies these individuals their autonomy. This ethical persecution for treating others as a means to an end should not be for sex work and sex work alone. Kant's views on ethics should also not be imposed upon others.

Through this Western lens, some believe that people become prostitutes only because they are homeless, uneducated, and lack better alternatives in life. Many also believe that those in the sex work industry are victims of circumstance and/or

were forced against their will. However, through my research, I found that the number of practicing sex workers who were coerced or trafficked into the industry may make up only a small portion of the whole. It is important that this be known in order to avoid generalization.

Morals in Western society are often religiously based. I do not believe that the West's ideas of right and wrong, especially not religiously-influenced ideas, should dominate the discourse on labor rights to sex work. This is problematic because morals are relative. Western ideas of right and wrong may not be the same as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, or those in the Far East and so on. It is therefore ethnocentric in a way for discourse on sex work to be permeated with Western morals and notions of right and wrong.

Looking at sex work through a moral lens risks generalization as well as other problems. For example, sociologically, treating all sex workers as if their choice of work was involuntary denies them their agency. This type of generalization denies them their rights to self-determination; the right to make decisions about their own lives. Entering the discourse with the pre-existing belief that the sex industry is morally wrong risks exaggerating, over-simplifying, and generalizing a very complex and sometimes even culturally-relative practice.

In my research I found that though sex trafficking and coercion is a growing problem, coercion is not the case for every sex worker. Treating sex work as if it

is always forced presents a number of negative consequences for sex workers who were not forced into the practice. We should not allow generalizations and the use of certain events to increase the criminalization and legislative control of sex workers. This could drive those in need away from help such as public health programs and legal protection. I believe it is best to assess the field of sex work as it is, instead of generalizing based on our own traditional thoughts, beliefs, and ideals. Imposing our morals based on assumptions or little evidence will do more harm than help to those that may need it.

#### *Socio-economic dimension*

Studies have shown that women with lower socio-economic status are more likely to engage in prostitution than those with higher-socio-economic status. Also, women without any professional/vocational qualifications were found to engage more in prostitution than those with professional/vocational qualifications (Ochere and Nanewortor 1). Another ethical issue raised by prostitution is the fact that many women are actually pressured or forced into sex work. For example, underprivileged girls from lower end communities might resort to prostitution as a way to make a decent amount of money to support themselves and/or their families. Many prostitutes are in fact uneducated and placed in an unfortunate situation from an early age. This could leave them without any other alternatives but to enter the sex work industry. In this particular situation, prostitution is seen as the only viable way to escape poverty.

I believe it is important to address the root causes of the issue instead of just the surface of the issue. Poverty and socio-economic status is one of the largest influences on voluntary, pressured and forced prostitution. Many prostitutes are uneducated, illiterate, and do not possess any skills that would enable them to obtain any other occupation. Economic pressure is a huge factor contributing to sex work practice. I believe this is the real problem. Individuals should be choosing prostitution in relation to equal or better options, not as a last resort. This is why economic empowerment is vital. Economic empowerment may curb the number of individuals economically pressured into entering the sex work industry.

Poverty and vulnerability are often associated with each other. Living in poverty and vulnerability means that one is deprived of basic needs such as health, education, as well as the control over one's environment or situation.

Vulnerability can be a byproduct of poverty. The lowest classes on the socio-economic scale are typically the most vulnerable group in comparison to others. They are more vulnerable to hazards, economic instability, natural disasters, etc. Poverty and vulnerability are two vital aspects in the conversation on sex work and human trafficking. It is important to include these aspects in the attempt to understand the scale and scope of sex work at the international level. While sex work and human trafficking is prevalent in both developed and developing countries, two significant causes may be poverty and vulnerability.

Poverty marginalizes people, often resulting in vulnerability. Sex work provides a risky alternative and it is for this reason that these causes must be addressed.

Through acknowledging and addressing these root causes, the local, national, and international communities can offer better recommendations and support for policies that wish to empower and protect sex workers by their situation.

## Conclusions

Despite its great supply of human and natural resources, Nigeria, specifically its Niger Delta region, has been socially and ecologically degraded for centuries by international crime and human rights violations. Though it has experienced a transition to democratic rule, Nigeria represents one of many countries where individuals experience considerable pressure to emigrate. Nigeria is a unique case; however, many of its characteristics, such as the prevalence of corruption and violence and their ability to pervade society, are seen across international borders. What does make Nigeria unique is its size and its subsequently large diaspora. Nigeria's rapidly growing population rate and its economic divides make Nigeria an exceptional case for poverty and corruption-related activity. The movement of Nigerians within Nigeria and across international borders has created networks such as those involved in the human trafficking and trade industry.

The trafficking networks from Nigeria to Europe have been able to offer women and girls the opportunity to travel to Europe and elsewhere abroad. These offers have involved different levels and occurrences of fraud. Although many recruited women in the transnational sex industry are aware that they will be working as prostitutes, they often find themselves in situations worse than they had anticipated. After having "sealed the deal" through rituals such as "juju," Nigerian sex workers accumulate a debt they are often unable to pay. What I found surprising is how the cycle of sex work, voluntary and involuntary, is often

perpetual. Former sex workers and trafficking victims themselves become madams and syndicates in the industry. The cycle thus appears to be self-reproducing. The accumulation of debt along with the stigmatization and intersectional discrimination experienced by Nigerian sex workers abroad has made conditions even harder while working abroad.

Certain dynamics of sex work and Nigerian trafficking, such as economic pressure and coercion, are not dissimilar to any other nation. Overwhelming poverty, gender-discriminatory policies and traditions, political corruption, neglect, resource mismanagement and misrule are all elements necessary in the discussion of trafficking practically anywhere in the world. All of these elements are breeding grounds for human rights violations.

The reduction and elimination of human rights violations and human trafficking require not only good governance capable of reforming cultural practices and traditional beliefs, but also a more modern, culturally-sensitive, rights-based understanding of women's rights and labor rights at the local, national, and international levels.



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### **Summary of Capstone Project**

Globalization has allowed people to seek opportunities and escape problems of scarce resources, war, and natural disaster by migrating and resettling elsewhere. However, this has led to a series of international problems, which include transnational crime. Human trafficking has increased at alarming rates. This phenomenon exists against the backdrop of poverty, unemployment, and social instability, signaling a correlation between these elements.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the case study used in this research. According to US Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, as of 2012, Nigeria is a "Tier 2" country. Tier 2 countries are those whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards. Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking.

Researchers have found that trafficking is largely influenced by deepening poverty and a deterioration in living conditions of persons in Sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa forces many young persons into sex work. The declining fortune of Africa's economies is a strong factor that compels families into encouraging young girls to go into sex trafficking. Out of desperation, young persons risk everything to find their way to rich countries in the North with the assistance of trafficking syndicates.

Researchers also cite factors such as rural-urban migration, unemployment, poor living conditions, peer influence and the collapse of the family institution. Within the Nigerian context, the primary causes of trafficking in women are unemployment and the low socio-economic status of women especially in parts of Edo and Delta states where it thrives.

From a socio-economic perspective, Nigerian women are today proving their equality with their male counterparts both within Nigeria and internationally. Young women have discovered their own lucrative business in Europe, as have men. When such girls fall into the hands of the syndicates on human trafficking, they are trapped once they are promised a secure and meaningful job; as long as they make hard currency. And once it is made, no one asks the manner through which it is made. In Nigerian society, women are also enticed by offers of employment abroad as dancers, bartenders, hostesses or au pairs and end up, sold in debt, on the pavements of some unknown country. Even those who know that they are heading into prostitution do not anticipate the violence and abuse that lay ahead. They are also often misled about the conditions under which they will have to work.

Traditionally, prostitution is viewed as forced objectification of women by men, and it is not widely discussed that some voluntarily enter the sex work industry, especially not in Nigeria. The reason behind this is that prostitution typically occurs under circumstances that are unfavorable to the woman. The average age



of prostitution is 12 to 14 and the circumstances are usually deplorable. Those recruited abroad are almost never told the full truth of what awaits them, and there is often no quitting. The idea of prostitution is thought to involve women in the streets working under abysmal conditions and involved in “survival sex,” selling sex out of a dire need or to support a drug habit. Some are runaways with no other options, others are kidnapping victims, but there exist some women who do have other life options, but still choose to enter the sex work industry.

The campaign for sex workers’ rights and human rights must begin with debunking the myths surrounding prostitution and women’s sexuality in societies that have rendered this type of discussion taboo. Claiming that prostitution could be a choice is a major step in restoring the agency and subjectivity of each individual worker. Recognizing that these women have a right to survival and self-determination is a milestone in understanding the reality of sex workers. Still, this new dichotomous model of voluntary and involuntary sex work must be used with caution as it threatens to limit and simplify a very complex situation.