



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE
SOCIOLOGY & CULTURE

Volume 13 Issue 2 Version 1.0 Year 2013

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Tracking the Changing Status of Nigerian Women in the Era of Trafficking and International Sex Trade: An Ethnographic Analysis

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GJHSS-C Classification : *FOR Code : 370199, 420303*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of :



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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, trafficking women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is one of the risky sexual behaviour that has continued to attract global attention. An estimate showed that about 5-7 billion US Dollars is realized through women trafficking and transactional sex all over the world (International Organization for Migration, 2001). Globally, sub-Saharan Africa region including Nigeria accounts for over 20 per cent of those involved in illegal migration for transactional sex (UNESCO, 2005). In Nigeria, the phenomena of women trafficking and transactional sex have continued to generate much concern from the government due to the increased proportion of women and minors who are largely recruited clandestinely. A recent report by the United States yearbook described Nigeria as a leading source, transit and destination country for those involved in human trafficking for the purpose of labor and sexual

exploitation (US, Department of Homeland Security, 2010). Available data revealed that about 10,000 Nigerian girls are on the streets of Italy transacting sex (Germano, 2001), while another estimate disclosed that over 50,000 Nigerian girls are illegal migrants engaged in transactional sex on the streets of Europe and Asia (Loconto, 2002). The increase in trend of those deported from Europe as illegal migrants involved in transactional sex was documented by Ojomo (2001) when the author observed that in 1997, 10 women were deported. A geometric increase to 225 was recorded in 1999 and then suddenly to 1,092 in 2000. At the end of 2002, the number of these deportees had increased to 1,957 (UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003). Afterwards, the number of women deported from Europe over illegal migration, for the purpose of sexual transaction, has continued to soar even afterwards to the extent that the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) labelled Nigeria as a leading country in human trafficking especially as regards trafficking of the under aged or minors (Skogeth, 2006).

Majority of the deportees are from a particular ethnic group in Nigeria, popularly known as ‘Binis’. Benin City is the ancestral home of indigenous Binis and the capital of Edo State in the Southern part of Nigeria. It is currently regarded as a major market for cross border commercial sex work in Nigeria (Aghatise, 2002; UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003 Osezua, 2012). The magnitude and causes and consequences of women trafficking for the purpose of international sexual transaction on the Nigerian State has attracted the attention of several scholars who largely perceive it as social order problem justifying the combatant posture of the Nigerian government towards sex-trafficking and international sex trade. To buttress this stance, Nigeria is a signatory to some International Conventions, which are directly targeted at eliminating all forms of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, such as the Palermo Convention at the federal level. Furthermore, the 1999 Federal constitution has provisions which prohibit slavery and sexual exploitation especially in Section 34. In addition, the *Trafficking in persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act* was passed into law

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on the 14th of July 2003. The act which was signed into law by the immediate past President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo established a National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) which was saddled with the responsibility of enforcing laws against trafficking. Nigeria is also a signatory to many International Conventions. Some of these Conventions have been domesticated. Some of them include: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, 1979; Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of Prostitution of Other, 1949 and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981. Other include International Labour Organisation Convention on Minimum age on Forced Labour, 1999; Convention of Rights of Child, 1989 and United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000.

Majority of the studies previously conducted in relation to women trafficking and international sex trade in Benin City identified the causes and social consequences of women trafficking on the Nigerian State (WHARC, 2000; UNICRI/UNDOC, 2003 Onyeonoru, 2003, while others have identified the reasons for which sex trafficking has become resistant to the government combatant posture identifying patriarchy (Aghatise, 2002; culture and globalization, Osezua, 2012) as factors that continue to reinforce its existence. Yet in the light of this endemic nature within a defined context, in this case among the Benin's of Southern Nigeria, ethnographic information that captures the situation is rare. Also, researches have established that the women's continuous involvement in international sex trade is perennial in the region, but literature on the current status of women of this extraction in view of their widespread involvement in sex trade is largely undocumented, hence this study.

This study therefore aims at exploring the changing status of Benin women within the Benin family structures and the changes that are currently being mediated as a result of the growing incidence of transactional sex in the region. Extant literature continue to suggest that women of this extraction were previously restricted with series of taboos and traditions regulations, within a prevailing patriarchal *Bini* culture, but have become major 'actresses' in trans-border sexual transactions. These women earn 'hard' currency for their families (UNICRI/UNIDOC, 2003). These will certainly have implications on their current status within Bini family structure.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION.

Feminist Anthropologists have produced a corpus of research details about the gender roles in the

family. For a long time, the argument was that the subordination of women in the family and the society as a whole was universal. Consequently, Ortner (1974) in her groundbreaking research compares the subordinate position to the nature-nurture debate arguing that culture sought to control nature. Ortner (ibid) observed that women's social place in the domestic domain, brought her close to the role nurturance, and further accentuated her subordinate status of being close to nature. Hence, men are associated with 'up,' 'right', 'high', 'culture' and 'strength' while the women are associated with the opposites 'down' 'left,' 'low,' 'nature' and 'weakness' (Ortner, 1974; 72). Furthermore, the author concludes that these were not merely biological traits, but that they were cultural constructs, which underpinned expectations, rights, and roles values of being male or female.

Ortner's position about the universal subordination of women was criticized because it was considered a historical in its mode of analyses. Leacock (1978) observes that colonization and the emergence of capitalism had grievous implication on the status of women, which were not captured by Ortner's accounts. Ortner rejected the private/public dichotomy as a theoretical explanation for women's subordination maintaining that the development of private property as noted by Engels (1972) led to the devaluation of women in the family. Leacock (ibid) concludes by also taking a position in favour of the universal subordination of women.

On the contrary, Sacks (1974) queries the universal subordination of women as posited by the previous accounts. Rather, Sacks (ibid) posits that ethnographic and historical documents supported the variability of women status in the family. Sacks (ibid) observes that since the modes of production were not universal, consequently, in places where production was based on kinship systems, women and men were likely to have the same relationship to means of production. While emphasizing the variability of women's status in the family, stating that the status a woman occupied as a 'wife' usually differed significantly from her status as a 'sister', Sack's perspective became very influential in explaining gender relations within the context of most African families especially in pre-conquest Africa. However, Sack's analysis escaped the proclivity for universal gender asymmetry based on women and their position in the domestic domain.

Sudarkasa (1986) maintains that the status of women in indigenous African societies reveals that, except for the Islamized societies of sub-Saharan Africa, women were conspicuous in high places in pre-colonial times. She argues that women in pre-colonial Africa were queen-mothers, queen-sisters, princesses, chiefs, and holders of other offices in towns and villages. This position as expressed by Sudarkassa (ibid) further buttresses the arguments of the imperativeness of

taking a historical analysis of the status of women in African society.

Most third world scholars (Sudarkassa, 1981; Amadiume, 1987; Nzegwu, 2004) have dubbed these universal models of analysis 'western' or 'Eurocentric'. Nzegwu (2004) in her research revealed that Ibo women of the South-Eastern Nigeria enjoyed 'sexual autonomy' even within a marital union. Citing the case of *Nri* society, she opined that the Nigerian Ibo family sanctioned trans-marital relationships by women. Sudarkasa (ibid) further contests that family 'grafts' were outcomes of such relationships maintaining that the Ibo women were valued as 'daughters' and 'mothers'. Hence the desire for being a mother outweighed any notion of adultery among the *Nris*.

The examples of the Ibos of the South -Eastern Nigeria and others studies highlighted above describe the women position within the family. Despite the fact that there are studies, which have confirmed that most African women enjoyed a higher status in the family in relation to postcolonial era, it is evident that these scholars also have a proclivity of generalizing within the African context. They posed this same reaction against the 'western' scholars. There is a dire need, therefore, to take into cognizance the variability of these experiences and then attempt a context-based analysis within reasonable parameters.

a) *The Feminist Political Economy and Feminization of Survival*

The Feminist Political Economy, FPE deconstructs the traditional political economic theory that assumes social relations determined economic systems of production without giving a critical analysis to the existing inequality of social relations. Although the traditional political economic theory appeared more integrative than ordinary economic principles of demand and supply by attempting a description of the societies and the corresponding economic systems of production that stem from such social configuration, if failed capture the inherent inequality between the female and male gender in relation to economic resources in virtually all human societies. Intra Pares, (2004) defined FPE concerns as economics of groups, families, communities, neighborhoods, localities and regions as well as individuals. Its utility lies on its focus on people as social political and economic subjects or agents. The holistic integration of the social cultural and political conditions in which the subject operates constitutes the basis of such analysis.

Riley (2008) further posited that the macro, meso and microeconomics systems are highly gendered as there are evidently structural inequality within the social structure from which the subjects or social actors make economic decisions. In a bid to establish this shortcoming of traditional political economy, Luxton (2006) observed that social

reproduction, the work of nurturance and human family and community as part of unpaid work rendered by women in many societies. FPE identifies gender as a critical component of social relations which significantly influences political relationships and structures of power thereby culminating in differential access (Examine briefly the concept of feminization of poverty by Saskia Sassen (2000) Counter geographies and her recent discussion in *Animal Behavioural Science Journal* published in 2008)

Sassen (2002) consider the phenomena of trafficking and international prostitution as a gendered process of contemporary globalization. She argues that a crusade against international prostitution was indeed a refusal to appreciate the wider "social-moral" context in which these phenomena occur. She added that that the occurrence and pervasiveness of sex trafficking was an indicator of the "feminization for survival" of highly vulnerable migrant women (Sassen, 2002:274).

One of the strength of the political economy theory is its ability to explain global economic processes underlining social life of a society (Fajemilehin, 2000). It also captures the commitment to materialism and the institutionalization of corruption (Aluko, 2001). This has ultimately culminated in the shift of value system and a drastic change in traditional moral order. Hence, Oloruntimehin (1995) observed that there was an alteration in the value system unlike what obtained in the past. Hence values founded on honesty, hard work, trust and good name is now tilted towards dishonesty, huge profits for little work, distrust and the acquisition of wealth at the expense of good name, integrity and reputation.

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by the government in order to restructure the economy was a major catalyst of sex trafficking and international sex trade in the region (Aghatise, 2002). The mass retrenchment, employment embargo, freezing of public service salary and the devaluation of the domestic currency, coupled with the rise in inflation, all had delirious effects on family structures and the women were usually the major recipient of the economic toll in Nigeria (Oyediran and Odusola, 2004). They argue that the poverty level in Nigeria rose with SAP and women and children were more affected due to the gendered orientation of poverty in Nigeria.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper emanated from a larger study conducted by the author in 2009 in Edo State, South of Nigeia. It is an ethnographic research design which engaged techniques, including observation methods, Focus Group Discussions, (FGDs) using vignette stories and Key Informants Interviews (KII). The aim was to track the changes that have impacted significantly on the women status within the society, based on the very high migratory flow among the women in this society.



a) Study Area

The study site Edo State is one of the oil-producing areas of Nigeria. It has its capital as Benin City, which also doubles as the capital of Oredo Local Government, one of the selected local government areas. The inhabitants are predominantly the indigenous Edo – Speaking people also known as the Benin people of pre-colonial West Africa. Over the years, several people from neighbouring communities like the Esan, Afemai, Urhobo, Ibos and the Yoruba speaking people have migrated and settled in the study area. Benin City is a city with a very proud cultural heritage in the pre – colonial era within the West Africa Sub-region. The early contact that the Benin people had with the early Europeans in the early 15th century gave great impetus to the emergence of the monarch, known as the Oba, and the influence he wielded over the region. At the time of contact, the Benin Empire was highly organized under a strong influence of the Oba who was greatly revered by the subject as observed by Igbofe (1979) and Obiyan (1988). Three Local Government Areas which were purposively drawn from Edo Senatorial District constituted the specific sites of the study. These sites, Oredo, Egor and Uhumwode Local Government are described as one of the local government areas with the worse incidence of human trafficking for the purpose of international sex transaction. The population of the local government areas was placed at 3,742,671, 333, 899 and 120,813 respectively (Nigeria Official Gazette, 2006). Uhumwode, has a larger land mass but with a relatively smaller population. Major communities in the study area include Oko, Ugbague, Obagie Ogida, Useh, Igieduma and Obagie. Economic activities in both Oredo and Egor include furniture making, hotel management arts and crafts some level of agriculture which include the cultivating cassava, yam, cocoyam and plantain. Rubber plantation is also an important economic crop in the study area. Traditionally, in the study area, women assisted their husbands in the farms (Bradbury, 1957). They also played important roles in the house of *Iwebo*, the guild that was directly responsible for making special clothes and beads for the *Oba* (Agbontaen, 1990). Marriage to a ‘white man’ in pre-colonial era was considered abominable (Igbofe, 1979). Women could be inherited in much the same way as property (Bradbury, 1957). Divorce among Benin women is viewed as a colonial impact; however, it was granted to women of noble parentage (Usuanlele, 1999). Gender was a notable social descriptor. For instance, women’s quarters were separate from the men. Women were also perceived as an inversion of the ideal; hence they were put under several ritual restrictions, *awaa* (Curnow, 1997). Curnow further explains that sexual contact was minimized with women, in order not to abate the potency of protective charms, which were commonly used by men in pre-colonial era. To avoid spiritual contamination, bathrooms, buckets

were gender segregated. After sexual contacts, a man must thoroughly cleanse himself in order to keep his spiritual powers intact. It was also contrary to Benin customs for a woman to live separately from the husband that is outside the same geographical location except in cases of illness or a disagreement.

Present day Benin City is a civil service town. This is due to the vast number of government *parastatals* in the city. Although Edo State is part of the oil producing areas in Nigeria, the benefits of oil revenue have not made any visible impact on its economy. Rather, in *Gelegele*, one of the oil producing communities in Edo state, gas flaring resulting in environmental pollution is a common feature (Omorodion, 2004). Describing the detrimental effects on the health of women, Omorodion (*ibid.*) argues that in the event of unskilled job opportunities presented by these multinational companies, men were usually the major beneficiaries. Thus, the author concluded that the socio-economic predicament of women has continually left them at the lower rung of the society.

b) Data Collection

A total of 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using vignette stories were conducted among three categories of people: adult women, adult men, and youths. The vignettes stories were in two parts (a) the story of trafficked victim that ended on a “happy note” and (b) the story of a trafficked victim that ended on a “tragic note.” In each local government, the three categories of participants were exposed to both the “happy” and the “tragic” stories. Each focus group discussion session comprised an average of eight participants and lasted for an average of one and half hours. Four (4) keyinformants interviews were held with a male and a female that were versed in Bini culture and the family institution, a representative of a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) who had done extensive work on trafficking among the Binis, an opinion leader, and a government official. With the assistance of key informants from the University of Benin and NGOs that have done extensive work on human trafficking in Metropolitan Benin City, twenty- five trained female and male field workers were recruited for this study. The rationale of inclusion was their familiarity with the geographical and social terrain of the locations selected for the study, fluency in Bini and English language, and previous experience in social research. The interviewers were trained for a week in order to be able to negotiate a successful interaction with the household heads. The field workers were trained with the interview schedules. Role-playing was conducted severally under the supervision of the lead author in order to test for accuracy of questioning and reporting. The field workers actively participated in conducting the household/family based interviews, while the authors handled the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Majority

of the interviews were conducted in Pidgin English (the unofficial lingua franca in Nigeria), a few in Bini language and the rest were in English Language. Triangulation approach was adopted in the analysis of all the data generated.

c) *Data Analysis*

With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audiotaped, interviews held in Pidgin English were translated into English, and transcribed. The approach used to analyze the interviews was content-based as suggested by DeVault (1990); Woods, Priest and Roberts (2002). All the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. The transcripts were rereads several times by the authors and thematic patterns that emerged from the participants perspectives were observed. To achieve this, all the transcribed data were reviewed line-by-line to analyze the main concepts, and these concepts were given codes. Second, the codes were compared for interrelationships and organized into thematic categories. However, this produced broader codes than the initial ones.

Common themes that emerged through this process reflected a shared understanding among participants of the phenomena of women trafficking and transactional sex. To provide an indication of the accuracy of theme generation and allocation, three well experienced social researchers in qualitative techniques were approached to participate in the data coding process as suggested by Woods, et al (2002). From the transcripts coded in this manner, a resulting level of agreement (70%) was achieved. Thereafter, all the thematic narratives were built into context.

d) *Ethical Consideration*

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, participation was voluntary. Attempts were made to explain the objectives of the research to the various categories of participants included in this study and their decision for anonymity was respected. All participants were duly informed of their right to withdraw at any time from the study.

IV. SOCIO DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS IN THE STUDY

Percentage Distribution of Family Structures /Household heads' Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics by Local government areas

Family Composition	Local Government of Origin							
	Egor		Oredo		Uhumwode		Total	
	N=40	%	N= 40	%	N=40	%	N=120	%
Family Head Type								
Male headed households	34	85.0	31	90.0	28	82.5	93	77.5
Female headed households	6	15.0	9	10.0	12	17.5	27	22.5
Family Type								
Nuclear Family	15	37.5	17	42.5	20	60.0	52	43.3
Extended Family	25	62.5	23	57.5	20	40.0	68	56.7
Polygynous Households								
Two wives	14	60.9	13	46.9	12	52.9	39	52.7
Three wives	6	26.1	12	42.9	7	30.4	25	33.8
Four Wives	3	13.2	2	7.1	2	7.1	7	9.5
Seven wives	0	0	1	3.6	2	8.7	3	4.1
Marital Status of family heads								
Married	31	77.5	32	80.0	30	75.0	93	77.5
Separated/Divorce	5	12.5	4	10.0	2	5.0	11	9.2
Widower/Widow	4	10.8	4	10.8	8	20.0	16	13.2
Occupation of family heads								
Artisan	5	12.5	4	10.0	10	25.0	19	15.8
Civil Servant	10	25.0	9	22.5	10	25.0	29	24.2
Professionals	5	12.5	6	15.0	2	5.0	13	10.8
Retirees	10	25.5	12	30.0	12	30.0	34	28.3
Self employed	20	40.0	9	22.5	10	25.0	19	15.8
Religion of Family Heads								
Christianity	32	80.0	29	72.5	31	77.5	92	76.7
Muslim	2	5.0	-	-	-	-	2	1.6
Traditional Religious Beliefs	6	15.0	11	27.5	9	22.5	26	21.7
Family Head Monthly Income								

The household interviews conducted revealed the Benin family structure which constitutes the context in which the Benin woman is embedded. Majority of the families in the study area are male-headed households with a higher number of female-headed household in Uhumwode, a relatively rural community. This is attributable to by the rural –urban migration by males in search of better economic opportunities. Most of the family types are extended in all the three LGAs studied with polygynous marriages very pervasive in the three localities despite the predominance of Christianity. The highest no of professionals are found in the urbane LGA, Oredo.

Four key informants selected on the basis of their statuses and versatility in Benin history and culture. One of them was a renowned student of history under the legendary chronicler of Benin History Pa G. Egharvba, and another one a strategic traditional chief who wields a level of influence in the Benin Kingdom. The other informant, an octogenarian and a princess of the Kingdom and the last informant is a co-coordinator of prominent NGO in Benin and activists who has done extensive researches on gender issues in Benin. Interviewed key informants fell within the age range of 51-85 years of age. All except one (1) are Christians. The least qualification that key informants had was a Nursing and Midwifery certificate while the highest qualification obtained by the key informants is a doctor of philosophy (PhD) degree.

a) *Gender and decision making in traditional Benin Society*

Household heads interviewed were asked to present information on what they knew described the traditional Benin society based on cherished values and norms. One of the female-headed household heads stated

When decisions were made, women were not allowed. It was for the man's family and the male elders in that compound.

Member of a household in Oredo (Female)

A male household head further corroborated this:

Their (women) opinion was not important; they are relegated to the background when decisions are reached. Their role is just to implement.

Household head from Oredo (Male)

Drawing inference from this stance, a well trained Benin woman was expected to reflect these virtue of passivity and invisibility in public discourse. One house -hold head interviewed put this more succinctly.

When there is talk in the family a woman cannot talk, no the talk is for the man. Women cannot talk for the matter 'wey man dey' (where there are men)

Household Head in Uhumwode (Female)

A male key informant provided further description of the traditional status of women in Benin thus:

Traditionally, a wife was economically self sufficient in that she provided for her children from the piece of land given to her by her husband to cultivate. Also women were exposed to different informal schools like poultry, animal husbandry, music or even traditional medicine. Some of them understood human physiology. This is because a woman was said to be very close to nature in Benin philosophy. Hence, in Benin, a married woman could not shake hands with another man. She could not stretch her legs out for another man to cross over, if a man were to stare at her lecherously, then she was expected to report the incidence to her husband; otherwise she would incur the wrath of the ancestors. Adultery incurred the wrath of the gods which could ultimately lead to the death of the husband by the gods. The women were put under traditional oaths of allegiance since this was the only means to test fidelity of a woman for reproductive purposes.

b) *Male Key Informant*

Another female key informant further elaborated:

When a woman came into a family, whatever the family forbade is what she forbade. When the woman was menstruating, she could not reach the apartment of the husband. She must not cook or even touch anything that belonged to her husband. She could not even greet the husband. She would need an intermediary to do so. In the palace, as at today, all these practices are still in operation. The man and his wife cannot use the same bucket for bathing.

The above views expressed by these the key informants are suggestive of the status of women in traditional Benin society. The need to put women under some of these ritual restrictions is seen from the views expressed above in which the key informants revealed that the traditional conception of the Benin woman is that she is very close to nature. These conceptions are closely linked with the ideological base of the Benin society of which there are prevailing beliefs in ancestral worship and therefore made the need to tame women imperative. A male key informant described the sexual restrictions and ritual associated with a traditional Benin wife.

A married woman must be faithful to her husband; once she was suspected (to be unfaithful), she must swear to the gods if she must remain in that husband's house. If it was a man, nothing was done since men were quite at liberty. If a man talked to a married woman about sex, she must immediately spit out and also confess to her

husband what she was told otherwise her own children would be affected. That is, they will bear the consequence.

Male household head in Oredo

In those days, another man did not use his hands to cross another man's wife's neck. A married woman did not shake any man anyhow. A married woman could not go to the front of a house and urinate whether during the day or night time. The clothes of a married woman are properly kept in the home.

Male head of household in Uhumwode

If a woman had an evil intention to kill her husband or harm any member of the family, the "ehinwinowa" will react negatively against the woman.

Male household head in Egor

Male informants were overtly explicit in recalling the sexual culture which the Benin woman was made to adhere to. Spitting out refers to what is symbolic. It is a cultural response to an as abominable act and viewed as a crime against the gods. Spitting out implied that there was not consent from the woman to sexual overture from males. Based on the Benin traditional values, the family structure was a superstructure which reflected these values. Hirschson (1984) has observed that in classical patriarchy, older men controlled women and children but usually ensured that the honour of a family was significantly tied to the honour of the females in that society. This explains one of the reasons why several restrictions were usually targeted towards the women in order for that family to enjoy certain prestige within the society.

V. TRACKING THE CHANGES IN STATUS OF WOMEN

Key informants identified major sources of change in the Benin family structure which had corresponding effects on the status of women in this region. They include Benin early contact with the Portuguese, the colonial experience with attendant Christianization and westernization effect; Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), an economic policy adopted by the defunct Military head of State, Gen. I. Babagidda and the tempestuous trafficking and international sex trade which has become very predominant in the region.

a) Contact with the Portuguese

Findings revealed that the conception of overseas travels is significantly linked with a form of prestigious and avenue to move up the social and economic ladder as in many other Nigerian societies. However, what makes the case of Benin different lies in the early contact with the Portuguese, which resulted in high profile migration to Europe by the ruling class.

There are general impressions about the fact that the Portuguese coming into Benin may have also created some form of curiosity in the minds of the adventurous Benin man. The way you can know that this had some impact on the people's mind can be seen through the arts (some art works which tried to depict the white man) and the dominant language that is pidgin that is still spoken widely among the Benin's to date.

It is a predominant rites of passage required to become part of the elitist class in the Benin society. One of the key informants teased that the current involvement of women in international sex trade was characterized by high male migration changed because of the large financial returns inherent in sex trade.

The desire to travel abroad actually started with the men in Benin. Most of them did not go to school; you know the average Benin man is very proud so they did not pay much attention to Western education initially. They opted to travel overseas and many of them were involved in low paying job since they were not well educated. A significant number of them were into hard drugs and other bad businesses. Many of them were getting jailed over there and were therefore bringing stigma to their families back home. I think many of these families had to change their minds and felt that the female members who after all could not bear the family name for a long time could be used moreover, the girl child is seen as one whose membership in a family is short lived. The position of women has not changed despite her involvement in trafficking, which many of these women think is financially empowering. With all the money they have made, have they being acknowledge? They (trafficked women) are just being used by men again as it has always being the case.

b) Colonial Experiences

Key informant opined that colonialism played a significant role in eroding the values of Benin women in relation to marriage and chastity. Divorce is described as "a colonial legacy" by a male key informant in the study and is viewed as a negative impact of colonialism by respondents. A female key informant observed that colonial contact, which culminated in Christianizing Benin indigenes, also impacted significantly on the status of the woman positively. She opined:

Women were traditionally subject to their husbands until western education came. This led to the introduction of new concepts which started affecting the relationship at home (family). Women's roles were also affected with Christianity. Some men who went to church began to discard the idea of polygyny and they stuck with one wife. That woman became more secured since she did not have to fear other wives. Some men also started accepting

that female children are as valuable as male children.

c) *Structural Adjustment Programme*

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was also an epochal period in the history of Nigeria which some scholar have agreed had a deleterious effect on the family structures in Nigeria. The economic restructuring distorted existing structures within many homes as most bread winners lost their jobs in the heat of mass retrenchment that accompanied the liberalization process. However there was a remarkable event which proceeded the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era when the then military governor of the defunct Bendel State Brigadier S.O Ogbemudia (Edo state was carved out of Bendel State) arbitrarily awarded juicy contracts to women in the state without taking gender or marital status into consideration. One of the male key informants opined:

With the colonial rule, women could be said to have had some assets, became independent and owned property. This situation improved considerably during Ogbemudia (Governor when women had access to bidding for contracts) for the first time a sizeable number of women seized this opportunity, and they began to acquire landed properties. Due to the inheritance system, women cannot inherit from their father's property. This trend became superfluous and thus led to some changes in the female position. When the women owned their houses and earned their own money, they no longer deferred to their husbands and the trend continued.

This era gave way to the SAP era, which led to the event as chronicled by a key male informant.

Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) made women work outside the home which they were not used to and placed serious economic burden on them. The men became jobless and they did not want to go to farm.

Another female key informant disclosed:

SAP brought hardship to the families. Naturally, the Benin man is a proud man. The abriba" (a male tailor, usually from Ibo origin who hawks his trade around in Benin town) was laughed at by the Benin man for doing dirty jobs. So you can see that there were some things like menial jobs. So the women again bore the brunt and so they had to work.

d) *Women Trafficking and International Sex Trade*

The phenomena of trafficking and transactional sex have created multiple effects on the social perception of women status within the family structure and the society. There was a consensus by the categories of the FGD participants and some of the family heads as they expressed the view that the phenomena had ambivalent effects on the family structure.

On the contrary, the key informants proposed and cited instances of how trafficking and transactional

sex are engaged as liberating tool by women of low social economic class. In the same vein, many of the participants in the FGD participants in both males and female categories in all three LGAs agreed that less educated women were more likely to adopt trafficking as a form of economic empowerment than those who are well educated. Here are some of the responses by a male participant in an FGD with men (Egor) were they were exposed to vignette A (*the tragic story*):

You don't know how many homes this abroad thing and trafficking have broken in Benin. Many homes have scattered because the woman now gets money in dollars so the husband cannot control her again.

This observation is in line with the view that women trafficking in the area had granted women of this region, greater access to critical resources like economic resources, land and credit facilities, there is a commensurate improvement in her status in the family and society. This was an obvious departure from what obtained in traditional Bini society as expiated by scholars of Bini History (Egarevba, 1949, Bardbury, 1952) when they described the family structure as a co-operative unit. It is clear that there is a major alteration from an essentially co-operative kin unit to co-operation to an inherently competitive relationship where the father and mother do not plough on the same field any more. A key informant elaborated on the social implications of the phenomena on the social dynamics of the Bini family system:

'The phenomenon of trafficking which is an economic design to have people from another country and use them for their selfish purpose, have impacted negatively on the Bini family structure. It has destroyed the virginity of the female children which represented one of the core values of the Binis and made the girl child a money making venture. Secondly, it has broken down the structure of marriage in many homes. When a woman finds out that her daughter is the economic mainstay, she will raise her shoulder against her husband'.

(Male key informant)

The female key informant expressed further on the perceived functionality of the phenomena on the status of Bini women. She remarked thus:

'The Bini woman has some control over her family now. At 40, she already has her own house. Before now, the husband needed to be aware if she had to build a house, hence the husband could be involved in the foundation ceremony called 'Olu'. Nowadays some of these things have changed. A Bini wife does not inherit property in the event of the death of her husband, by custom, so she has to fend for herself. Now she is able to get those things, which the culture denied her of since some of them started getting involved in trafficking. Those women

who are properly educated are not usually involved in sex trafficking'

(A female key informant)

In the same vein, some of the household heads and the FGD participants argued in support of trafficking and transactional sex, describing the phenomena as major catalyst of changing the status of Bini women. Hence, a female member of household in Oredo maintained:

'My husband is irresponsible. My daughter in Italy built this house and bought this small car. If not for her, I wonder what my fate could have been in this world. (She begins to pray for her)

(Female Member of household)

The excerpt above portrays that the phenomenon of trafficking is challenging the age long power wielded traditionally held by men over women for a long time which sustained the culture of deference by women. There was a consensus among the various categories of FGD participants that women who get proceeds from children abroad among the Binis become proud, thereby culminating what many considered as significant factor causing marital insubordination of the female folks to their husbands in the study area. FGD participants in Egor held with women cited instances of some married women who connived with their friends to travel abroad for the purpose of trans-border sexual transactions without their husband's knowledge. One of the FGD participants (female category) in Egor revealed how a trafficker helped a bosom friend to Europe whom she felt was suffering too much. She stated that the husband was not aware of the plans and that when her friend's husband confronted her; she lied and claimed total ignorance. She further revealed that it was after the woman had settled down there (Italy) that she contacted the husband. The FGD participant further added that the woman had built a house and bought a car for her husband now, that this woman comes home during Christmas period, and that she was still happily married to her husband. When asked whether this was not a taboo in Bini custom, she opined:

...any time my friend comes, she will kill a goat for sacrifice and resume her duty as a wife, since she has done the required cleansing rites.

In another FGD conducted among the women in Oredo, one of the participants observed that in certain instances, married women, chose to go to Europe for prostitution in agreement with their husbands. She cited a woman who happened to be her neighbour who refused to allow her daughter to be trafficked but insisted that she would rather go herself. She eventually made contacts with a syndicate group and travelled out for transactional sex.

'That was how that woman trained her six children, 4 are graduates now, and the last two are

in good schools here in Benin City. Whenever she comes home, she will kill a goat. They say that there is no taboo on the male organ of a white man anymore. The man is still married to her and has only one wife'.

Similarly, younger women who are involved in international sex transaction among the Binis appeared to be held in high esteem within their families of orientation. Their words were not contested since it is the case of "he who paid the piper dictates the tune". From the FGDs conducted on the adult men in Oredo and Uhumwode and youths in Oredo, participants that were exposed to vignette B expressed similar opinions. Here is an excerpt of the FGD held in Uhumwode illustrating the fact that successfully trafficked victims are highly revered in their families of orientation:

The truth is that when these girls don't succeed, they are ridiculed but when they do, they are actually worshipped. They are totally in charge and in control of that family. They decide what the immediate family should do with the money that they send; otherwise, they will threaten that they will not send any money. Therefore, everyone has to do her biddings.

The Youth FGD in Oredo also buttressed the opinion above:

If you see where these "Italo" girls are talking to their senior bothers, nobody can really control them, not even their parents, since they are the ones bringing the dollars and their siblings have to comply with whatever they say. They don't have the mouth to talk when she takes any decision in the family. Most times the parents have to comply because she is the one bringing the money for wedding or burial ceremonies; she is the one who builds the houses.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The paper examined the changing status of Bini women occasioned by the upsurge and endemic nature of the phenomenon of trafficking for the purpose of transactional sex. The findings showed that a number of women especially the uneducated women conceived trafficking as an empowering process and one that brings prestige to one. This was supported by success stories of women that have achieved success and social recognition, social relevance and prestige within their families and the larger society through cross-border transactional sex. With such achievements, it becomes an impetus for other women to get involved in the "business". Consequently, most of the stories that were told in the process of data gathering were usually success stories of those whose decision to travel outside the shores of Nigeria to transact sex were greatly rewarded. In cases where they ended tragically, victims were condemned as well as perpetrators.

Preference was often given to success stories. For instance, in the accounts of married women cited, the women were portrayed as fortunate despite the deception involved in the first case. In some cases when there was a joint agreement between couples on the wife's involvement in international transactional sex, consequently such marriages were not threatened by such women's involvement in transactional sex.

Access and control to scarce resources were not the same as one of the key female informants argued. She opined that it was not in all the cases that women who are trafficked have control over what to expend the money or the booty from such sexual trans-border transactions. There fore, she concludes that the phenomena of trafficking and international transactional sex have continued to enhance the men's statuses in the Bini family structure and in the society. It appears from the above submissions that women that are involved in transactional sex are enjoying more positive perception from their family of orientation than what was reported by Izugara (2007). In the study, Izugara reported how sexworkers playing their trade locally were disowned and avoided by their relatives or significant others. However, findings from this study, which focused on international transactional sex where foreign currencies are earned, a different picture emerged as family of orientation considered their females that are into transactional sex as their economic liberators.

The recruitment of female children from this extraction is greatly rewarding as a significant number of them are viewed as "successful" in sex work since large amount of foreign currencies are remitted to their families. This supports findings from similar studies (e.g. Longo & Telles, 2001; Naaneen, 1991; Khus, 1991). Earlier studies among Bini people have confirmed that the Western Union operated by the First bank PLC had its busiest office in Benin City, as a result of many illegal migrants, including trafficked victims who send monies to their parents in form of remittances (UNICRI/UNODC, 2003).

However, findings from this study showed an apparent change in this traditional structure was subtle from the Portuguese contact through colonial and economic restructuring to sex trafficking for the purpose of transactional sex. Many women who were hitherto impoverished longer culturally subservient especially when they are direct beneficiaries of transnational remittances realized from sex trafficking. In addition, there are increased incidences of family disorganization resulting from disagreement over resource control in many Bini families especially those which were hitherto referred to a poor households.

Furthermore, Bini women status occasioned by the phenomena of trafficking, show that uneducated women, viewed sex trafficking as a form of empowerment, through which liberty can be obtained from the conservative and oppressive culture. For them,

the advantages or benefits may well outweigh the risks of contacting sexually transmitted.

Diseases or being killed in the process. One of the government officials interviewed in the key informants disclosed that when they go out for anti-trafficking campaigns, they go with police escorts who are well armed. She added that strong resistance from Bini market women often accompany such outings. Some Bini market women will argue that it was "Italo" money or "ashewo" fortune that had provided money for them to live better lives. Although it will be erroneous to generalise such views among all the family members of transactional sex workers. Beliefs and other cultural values including religion could influence the disposition of family members towards relatives or associates that are involved in transactional sex. However, emerged evidence suggests that wealth creation among the Binis is undergoing a trajectory, as women are now key actors in the process, which was previously dominated by the males during the colonial and early postcolonial era. While this argument may not be over-emphasized due to dearth in literature and available data about those who constitute the trafficking syndicates, but sufficient account of data have revealed that sex trafficking is highly gendered trade with women constituting the bulk of the victims (Aghatise, 2002; Bamgbose, 2005). At least as observed during the slave trade, the male were principally involved in the sales of slaves to the Europeans (Igbafe, 1979).

In addition, there are clear changes in chastity rule with regard to young female children sexuality. However, there is less emphasis on sexual chastity in contemporary 23 Bini families. This is supported by the pressure on many Binis to acquire wealth and belong to the social class of those who have relatives abroad. A recent Bini proverb that tends to exacerbate the phenomenon of cross border sexual transaction is the saying "that the male organ of a white man cannot desecrate the woman's sexuality runs contrary to traditional precepts about the white men in Traditional Bini Society. Hitherto, marriage to white man was forbidden traditional Bini families. This has further strengthened these practices and weakened the girl-child's resistance to traffickers.

These changes observed in the status of several contemporary Benin women in the era of sex trafficking and transactional sex trade has brought to the fore the relevance of the feminist political economy that capture the structural gender inequality that pervades the political socio-economic landscape in Nigeria. Gender disparities in access to critical resources, income and political participation are clearly evident within the Nigerian State. A recent observation by the latest edition of the Gender Report by the British Council (2012) disclosed that the nature of gender inequality in apparently prosperous Southern Nigerian States was more obvious comparatively. This again affirms the

rationale for women in this extraction to adopt a survival strategy as posited by Sassens (2000), which she described as a feminization of survival.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Majority of women from this extraction still perceive trafficking and prostitution from a positive side. With some imagining, that their neighbour will be the unfortunate sex-trafficked victim. Also, the hegemonic male dominance which has continued to serve as a catalyst for the present crops of uneducated women who are in the lower rung of the economic class of the society who have sought for a change through an unhealthy avenue-sex trafficking. Sex trafficking among the Binis can therefore not just the product of poverty, but a feminine protest in response to unhealthy oppressive culture that has sustained high forms of discrimination against women and which have continued to be perpetrated by traditional belief system.

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