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PAT IZIENGBE**

<http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/the-economy-of-international-prostitution-in-Benin-and-the-place-of-the-Purray-Boys.pdf>

**THE ECONOMY OF  
INTERNATIONAL PROSTITUTION  
IN BENIN  
AND THE PLACE OF THE  
'PURRAY BOYS'**



OMOREGIE PAT IZIENGBE<sup>1</sup>

**THE ECONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL PROSTITUTION IN  
BENIN AND THE PLACE OF “PURRAY BOYS”**

**Abstract:**

Existing literature insists on coercive dynamics that thrust victims into prostitution networks. This paper takes a different stand by underlining the preliminary awareness of various victims of human trafficking. Based on field research undertaken in Benin City, Edo State, the study delves into the role of the so-called Purray Boys in the international prostitution networks. It investigates the kinship networks and how they play out in the making of the human trafficking networks by unravelling the kinship dynamics as critical in the international economy of prostitution.

Key words: Benin City; Purray Boys; international prostitution; international economy

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## INTRODUCTION

Findings revealed that poverty is a common experience for many of the women involved in sex trafficking as they perceive it as a viable option towards terminating generational poverty. Contrary to existing literature that argues that many of these women were coerced into sex trade by traffickers, findings revealed that 12 women out of 15 of the survivors admitted they were aware of the nature of the job, while 10 of them approached traffickers themselves.

“In the middle of the night my mother and my elder sister woke me up and asked me to look at the level of poverty they are in. We were all in our one room apartment; they pleaded with me to travel out of the country to help the family. They said I should please travel to rescue the family from shame of poverty. That was how my journey began; I did not know which country I was going to, my sister took me to one man who took me out of Nigeria.

While I was hawking in the community where I lived with my parents, a lady that bought things from me asked me if I would like a better life. She said she would take me outside the country where I would make a living by making hair. I was very happy with the idea and that was how I ended up in Libya as a prostitute..... All kind of men with different body smells slept with me where I was locked up like a prisoner.

Uncle, will you marry Osas? She is fine and nice; oh, how much can she pay me to marry her? If she can pay me hundred thousand euro, then I can consider marriage with her.

Why do you spend so much money on a man that is not yet your husband? It is normal to spend on the man you love; people are only making a big deal out of it because we are in Europe. When I was in Nigeria, we used to give our boyfriends money. In Europe, the competition to keep a man is so high and that is why we spend so much money to keep

them. If you spend much on a man, you have a chance of keeping him. My sister, we too want to have a family.”

Trafficking and international prostitution thrived in Russia and Ukraine after the fall of the old Soviet Union. That was also the situation in Serbia, Romania, and several other nations that experienced wars, hardships, political and economic instability. The case was not different in Nigeria after independence from the early 1980s when the country was under serious economic crisis. The challenges began during the civil war (1967-1970) and values and standard of living dropped. The oil boom took place immediately after the civil war. The fall of oil prices led to economic recession.

The above excerpts show that international prostitution and trafficking had gained ground in Nigeria and in Benin, in particular due to its economic relevance. Benin, which is one of the minorities cities in Nigeria, had been disadvantaged in the sharing of natural resources. Edo state hardly had any major means of economic development. Thus, during the period of economic crisis in Nigeria, the people had to seek alternative means of survival. According to Osadolor, trafficking and prostitution began to thrive in Benin during the period of economic crisis of the 1980s. He explained that the first set of girls that were trafficked from Benin were unaware of what was awaiting them in Europe. However, with time and exposure, most Benin girls became aware of what they were going to Europe for; several of them did not regard themselves as being trafficked and only saw their traffickers as someone trying to “help” them from poverty through a new life in Europe. This is because they did have a clear picture of what was awaiting them in Europe. And when they became fully aware of what was obtainable in the trade, the economic benefits kept many in the job. From the early 1990s to the year 2000, the trade had already taken a new dimension, as former trafficked girls have now become traffickers themselves. New madams with several girls under them began to spring up from different locations. The devaluation of the Nigeria currency during the period of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) also encouraged trafficking. However, the fourth and the fifth excerpt reflect the emergence and place of “Purray boys” in the trade. The rise of Purray Boys in the trade also increased trafficking in Benin. This is because the trade became more complicated as the interest groups increased. Young girls were now also willing to be trafficked knowing that if he or she “makes it”, she can buy a man for herself. It is cogent to note that almost everyone in Benin became directly or indirectly involved. All these interests were all based on the economic benefit of the trade.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to evaluate the economic perspective of international prostitution in Benin and the

significant role or place of “Purray boys” in the trade. For proper organization, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction, while the second section states the problem; the third clarifies the methodology. The fourth examines the economy of international prostitution. The fifth also analyses the significant place of Purray boys. The last section is the conclusion and finding analysis.

## **I. Statement of Problem**

Benin City has remained the home town of most trafficked girls from Nigeria. Several researchers around the world have visited Benin in order to understand the reasons the city has continued to lead other towns in Nigeria as regards trafficking for sexual exploitation. These scholars have left the city with different perceptions of the problem (trafficking). Thus, most literatures have dealt with the problem of trafficking in Benin on the surface without an in-depth study of the people, culture and values. Some studies posit that prostitution is part of Benin culture, while others contend that poverty and greed are the major forces behind prostitution among Benin girls. However, this field research focus is on the economy of international prostitution in Benin and the role of Purray boys in the trade. The problem is that most girls and women trafficked in recent time from Benin were fully aware that they were going outside Nigeria for sex trade yet they were willing to embark on the journey. Their close family members were aware of the fate awaiting their wards, yet they supported them. The question is what is the driving force behind international prostitution among girls from Edo state? What has sustained international prostitution in Benin City? The research analyzes the significant place of “Purray Boys” in trafficking for sexual exploitation in Benin City. It carries out a critical evaluation of the emergence of Purray boys in the scene which have led the trade to a whole new dimension. The involvement of most family members is also pondered.

## **II. Methodology**

The method used in carrying out this work is historical methodology, both primary and secondary sources were consulted but for originality, most primary sources were carefully examined. Interviews were conducted with prominent scholars of Benin history to furnish us with detailed information on the historical perspective of Benin women and international prostitution. Also, there was a special place for interviews with girls and women who were and are still involved in sex trade in Nigeria, Africa and Europe. Purray boys were directly or indirectly consulted. Different NGOs connected to trafficking were also consulted. The research was carried out among girls who were trafficked from Benin to other parts of the world (Africa, Asia, and Europe). The main location of the research was *Upper Sokponba* which is one of the main areas from which trafficked girls usually migrate.

### **III. Terminology clarification**

- **Benin City**

Benin City is the capital of the present-day Edo State in Nigeria. The city is located in the South-South geo-political zone in Nigeria. It harbours the Edo speaking people and the ancient palace of the *Oba* of Benin. This is very significant in history as the same Benin City was once a large kingdom that later evolved into an empire which expanded to both the Western and Eastern part of the present-day Nigeria. The *Obas* of ancient Benin were very powerful warrior kings and lived in the present-day palace in Benin City.

- **Italo**

These are ladies who have gone to Italy to prostitute and have made some money (most of them were trafficked). They have a peculiar way they dress; they love to wear heavy gold jewelry and heavy make up to show their success, wealth and influence. They try to dress in a western manner to show that they have travelled out. The madams and older women among them are always sponsors. Most times when they visit Benin their major aim is to scout for girls who they can also recruit to Europe. They always hang out with younger men who have their ears pierced (Purray Boys) which is a sign of ownership.

- **Purray Boys, Centro Boys or Black Boys**

In order to have a clear description of the meaning of Purray Boys, interviews were conducted with some young men who have lived in Europe and have a great deal of understanding of the lifestyle of trafficked girls or international prostitute. There is a lack of understanding of the place and role of the Purray Boys in the available scholarship.

- **Black Boys**

According to Zuwa Omorogbe, (lives in Italy, he claims to be a part time Purray boy because he is also working in Europe and not totally dependent on a woman's money to survive) a Purray boy can also be regarded as a Centro boy or Black boy. Being called Black boy among Benin trafficked girls could be very derogative. It clearly refers to an African male dating trafficked girl/girls solely for financial gains. It means that a trafficked girl has remained under sexual exploitation due to her relationship with black boy who she spends all her money on. This black boy could be with her in Europe or in Nigeria<sup>2</sup>. In some situation, the girls sponsor their Nigeria black boy to Europe with their hard-earned money. Others can remain in Nigeria while their lovers in

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Zuwa Omorogbe at his residence in Benin City, December 2015

Europe and send money to build something at home. In most cases, the boys and girls' immediate families fight over trafficked girls' properties. In another scenario, the black boys remain in Nigeria while they help to recruit and send other girls to their girlfriends in Europe. As the new girls are paying to their madams in Europe, they become wealthier by the lead role they play.

In another case, a black boy in Nigeria or Europe can have more than one sex workers as his girlfriend, he promises both marriage and they are all investing in him hoping for a better future. While people around them can see that the relationship is going nowhere; the girls involved are blinded by love and hope of eventually settling down in marriage with the black boy. Thus, she invests all her money, time and property to sustain the relationship. The affair can lead to marriage but when the money is no longer flowing, the relationship breaks up and the girls are forced back to the street due to frustration. However, in many scenarios, the relationship never leads to marriage; it is just another form of exploitation for the girls.

- **Centro Boys**

Moreso Omorogbe explained that Centro means city Centre in Italy. Centro boys can be regarded as black boys with a class and high taste who are based in Italy. They are always very tall and handsome with good body build. Each of these boys are known for their designer clothes. After some young ladies have worked on the street and made some money, they will take their boyfriends (Black boys, mostly from Nigeria and Benin in particular) to the City Centre called Centro and buy them all kind of designer clothes. Those madams with a number of girls, having so much euro under their control will not only buy clothes for their boyfriends but they also spend lot of money on jewelry on them. They buy expensive gold trinkets for them and put a gold pin earring on their ear as a sign of ownership. In Italy for example, among the African community everyone knows who owns a particular Centro boy. Although, in many cases, the boys still cheat on their madam. It is cogent to note that it is the people who saw the girls shopping for their boyfriends in the city Centre that now call them "Centro Boys", this name is used in the Africa community in Italy who understood that the relationship was not based on love but on mutual benefit. While the young men wanted the ladies' money, the girls on the other hand could spare their hard-earned money only if they could find love and acceptance by an African who knew they were a prostitute yet ready to stick around with their breaking the African tradition and status quo. Thus, several trafficked girls work very hard in order to own a Centro boy. Most of these relationships also lead to children. Some Centro boys are in the habit of getting married to trafficked girls and eating up their money and later leaving them for a more current girl with more money in town. They also help to facilitate their girlfriend or wives trafficking business by going to Nigeria to scout for girl interested in



coming to Europe. Thus, some of them are regarded as “trolley or sponsors”. They become very wealthy and popular both in Nigeria and Europe as a result of their wives or girlfriends’ wealth. It is important to note that the fulltime Centro boys or the original Centro boys do not engage in any formal job in Europe apart from servicing the emotional need of trafficked girls and helping to facilitate their trafficking business. In a situation when a girl is left after spending so much money on a black boy in Italy, her friends will laugh at her that the boy has “Centro her” meaning her boyfriend has used and “dumped” her. Another significant point is that these boys have become very wealthy in Benin and some of their relationship with ladies have produced children; so as for the girls, even if the relationship did not work out, their consolation is their children. Quietly, but firmly, the Centro boys continued to help to facilitate the increase of trafficking in Benin by becoming readymade husbands and lovers for both street girls and ex-street girls. All these different groups began to emerge in the scene of trafficking in Benin due to the economic relevance of international prostitution.

- **Purray Boys**

Marriage is very important in Benin society and chastity was connected to marriage. Before a girl is married out in traditional Benin setting, both families investigate each other to see if they are good enough for their children. The past life of the girl also determines the kind of person that will marry her. An average Benin man is very proud; marrying an ex-prostitute is not good for his ego and image. The problems or the challenges faced by the first set of Italo were marriage and acceptance in the society. This first phase of trafficked girls found it difficult to start up a family after their return to Benin. This is because most of the men during that period were not ready to start up a family with an ex-prostitute or to be regarded as husband of ex-prostitute. Some of the girls or women could no longer have children after their return and at their demise, family members fought over their wealth. The second and the third phase of trafficked girls became more “careful and wiser”. Some of the girls deliberately had a child first before they left Nigeria and while others had been married with several children before they set out in search of greener pasture. For those that had no husband or children in Nigeria before they were trafficked to Italy or other parts of the world; they were ready to spend fortune on any black man who was willing to stay with them especially Benin boys.

Purray boys are young men of Benin descent who are in the business of satisfying the emotional needs of trafficked girls; they achieve this through the promise of marriage. The word “Purray” emanated from a particular type of food served with African soup in Italy similar to pounded yam that Nigerians eat with soup. For an average Benin man, his best food is pounded yam and Egusi soup. The best yam to make

this pounded yam is “Ekpen”, a brand of yam which is yellow in color instead of the conventional white yam. The men felt more honoured to be served Ekpen. Thus, the trafficked girls in Italy, discovered a flour called “Purray” which could produce a pounded yam that look exactly like Ekpen pounded yam that could only be found back home in Nigeria. The young ladies in order to keep their men, Benin boys in particular prepared the delicious delicacy for them. According to report from Italy, black boys loved this food as it reminded them of pounded yam in Nigeria made with Ekpen. This is the major reason they were called “Purray Boys” They got hooked to prostitute for good food and money.

The Purray boys were of various classes and levels. Most Benin boys in Italy had one time or the other been regarded as Purray boys. The first class Purray boys were usually very handsome and full time. That is, they did not engaged in any formal job but all their business was to sleep with trafficked girls. Most Purray boys became seriously involved in trafficking trade due to lack of access to formal employment in Nigeria and Europe. Their trick in getting these girls was marriage; they promise these trafficked girls marriage but before the marriage, they will need to build a house first in Nigeria. The girl, in anticipation of marriage put in more effort into the trade. Some of these girls are ready to do anything to make more money so that they can help their boyfriend to build a house that will facilitate their settling down. While these girls are on the street prostituting, the Purray boys sit at home and help her spend the money. There is no coercion in the relationship but there could be element of violence. The boys can beat up their girlfriend so badly that some of them end up in the hospital; they act as if they were helping the girls but the girls might even be the ones to apologize. Among these first class Purray boys, they had a clique and they do not take one another’s girls. These girls are like slaves to the men, this is due to the fact that they stand on the street during summer and winter just to hustle for their boyfriends. It is widely accepted in Benin that these boys use spiritual means to control and gain loyalty from their girlfriends and keep their love burning. It is important to note that it is difficult for Purray boys to marry any girl who has not spent almost all her savings on him.

#### **IV. Role of Purray, Centro and Black Boys in the trafficking**

The usual trafficking process may comprise the following stages:

1. Purray boys show love and give trafficked girls prostituting in Europe a sense of belonging and acceptance by the African society.
2. They promise the ladies marriage and home if they are able to meet their financial needs. It is also cogent to note that in their marriage, age is not a barrier. The woman can be ten to fifteen years older; as far she has money to spend, there is no problem.

3. They satisfy the women sexual and emotional needs.
4. Most importantly, they help the trafficked prostitute or ex-prostitute spend her money.
5. Also help the women to traffic other girls from Nigeria to Europe.
6. They marry the Italo girls but withdraw from the marriage when they can no longer provide for their needs. However, there are some few cases when the marriages are successful. There are also some situations when the Purray boys drives their “wives” back to the street in order to put food on their table.
7. Frustrated several girls in Italy as a result of disappointment, even those who had quit street life had gone back to the street due to shame of being left with nothing after lavishing so much on a black boy.
8. They helped to make trafficking very attractive in Benin, young girls now understood that after making money in Europe, there were very handsome available young men who were ready to marry them and make them the envy of other girls.
9. In some cases, the trafficked girls return back to Benin from Europe and snatch other ladies’ boyfriends/husbands with their wealth.
10. Among the Purray boys, arose a new set of very wealthy and influential young men in Benin.

## **V. Benin Women in a Historical Perspective**

The Benin kingdom, which later expanded to a vast empire, is renowned all over the world for its unique and complex socio-political culture. Scholars posit that the state has been established for about 2300 years before any contact with the Europeans. Its monarchy is referred to as one of the largest and longest in the West Africa forest states. Benin exemplified a sophisticated socio-political culture and a peculiar system of government with an intimidating aura of monarchy, coupled with a distinct artistic triumph. It is, however, cogent to note that women have constantly played significant roles in the evolution and development of its unique culture. In pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Benin society, women were and are still very relevant in the development of the state. The pre-colonial Benin women were unique; they were subject to the traditions and laws of the land, which made them constantly under the authority of men, yet, they contributed positively to the society. Ebohon puts it clearly:

Once a Benin woman is married she becomes the property of her husband. The family and the state have no say over her. She has nothing to say unless through her husband; it

is the jaw that speaks for the head. Her hands are tied and she is in a garden of love in the society because she looks and participates in less than ten percent of the activities in the society because other men are to her a taboo. She may sparingly be seen but never to be heard: i.e *Okho i d' agbafi*.

The Benin women virtually worshiped their husbands and referred to them as lords. The customs and traditions were sacred to the people. The people lived according to the guidelines of their customs and traditions. The virginity of a young maiden was celebrated by her mother and the society at large. In fact, it was a taboo for a young girl to lose her virginity before marriage. When a woman gets married, she is expected to remain with her husband until his demise. The state was well organized with taboos and laws that govern the people and kept them under constant checks and balances. It was a patriarchal society, which supported the lordship of men; while women were treated a little better than slaves and they gladly submitted to their husband's authority. Male children were source of pride and prestige, while a female child was only prepared to serve her husband.

This is not to claim that pre-colonial Benin law or traditions were perfect or flawless. But the fact remains that beyond its flaws (the laws and values) the people were contented with what they were and what they had been formed into. They did not need foreigners to dabble into their affairs and intervene in their private lives or teach them how to live. Ryder posits that Benin had contact with European for more than four hundred years (1485-1897). During this period of relations, there were several socio-economic changes and exchange that were involved in this relationship. But in all these diplomatic relation and contact, Benin was still able to hold tenaciously to her traditional practice. This is because during this period of study by Ryder, "the *Oba* of Benin and his chief were free and independent agent; they decided the line of their economic and other policies." Thus, they could not be easily transformed or re-oriented. Orobator in his work explained that Benin and the Portuguese relationship went sour because Benin did not allow the Portuguese to impose their religion and values on them. However, in the period studied by Igbafe, (that is Benin under British administration) Benin as an independent kingdom had ceased to exist.

Be that as it may, the ancient Benin kingdom began to experience drastic changes after the unjust British punitive expedition of 1897. The period 1897 to 1914 is referred to as the "dark days"; this was because of the deportation of *Oba* Ovoranwmen to Calabar and thus the British had total control over Benin. For seventeen years, Benin was without a sitting Monarch, while the British were doing everything possible to undermine and destroy the institution of Monarchy. This period is very significant

as it marked the beginning of confusion in the lives of the people. This was the beginning of a new phase in the history of Benin; every aspect of the state began to experience change as there were new forces and powers governing the people.

The structure of the state, political institution, state religion, laws and customs of the land were deliberately pulled down by foreign invaders. As early as 1472, Benin already had diplomatic contacts with the Europeans. As stated earlier, they related as equals and Benin's first European diplomats were the Portuguese. Although there was cultural exchange between these different states, most of these changes did not affect the value system of the people as the relationship was more economical. However, Benin relationship with the Europeans changed as a result of the British conquest in 1897. This was the period the British colonial authority deliberately pulled down all state apparatus, values, laws of the land and imposed their own. From 1897 to the present-day Edo state, the people have never remained the same.

It is imperative to note that the nineteenth century was a new beginning for the whole Kingdom. Its Monarch was sacked and deported to Calabar, there was a reshuffling of the socio-political system. The culture, tradition and customs of the people were altered and changes were introduced. There were political, economic, educational, religious and social changes that upturned the whole society. These changes paved way for divorce and young ladies and women were now given opportunity to make their choice of life partners. They were given liberty to live with any man they were pleased with and many taboos now became a normal way of life. The study contends that from the colonial period, the situation of Benin women began to change. The colonial authority created new laws, values, religion, and environment and most importantly women were now taxed. By 1909, foreign prostitute had begun to migrate to Benin from Nnsuka, these women were the ones that introduced the indigenous Benin women who were widow or divorced into the sex industry. This made several Benin women to seek for means of survival; that is how local prostitution began to spring up among colonial Benin women. These changes which took place in the colonial period altered the true state of the original Benin women which culminated into the challenges of international prostitution in post-colonial Benin.

It is cogent to note that international prostitution has continued to thrive in Benin due to the role of organized traffickers and its economic relevance in the society. The Dumez Company which was established in Colonial Benin, however, played significant role in the emergence of traffickers in the city. The first set of women that migrated to Italy in the post-colonial period were sponsored by their Italian boyfriends who worked with the Dumez Company in Benin. Most of these women and girls had no education or formal skills; they began to work in plantations.

They later realised that it was more profitable to work as prostitute than in the plantations. They generated significant incomes in a short time and also invited their friends and sisters to Italy for the same trade. As they returned back home they were celebrated as most people at that point did not really understand the kind of business they were engaged in Europe. Other women also found their way to Europe (mostly Italy) and made so much money through prostitution. It is important to note that most women among these first sets of Italos were not trafficked; they sponsored themselves to Europe to make more money (some were already prostitutes in Nigeria before they migrated to Europe). The number however, increased as a result of the economic crisis that enveloped the nation in the 1980s. The devaluation of the Nigeria currency through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1986. The dollar became very high compared to the Nigerian naira, the economy was very hard on Nigeria and Benin was disadvantaged in the Nigeria polity because she was not among the major ethnic groups who were in the corridors of power. There were no industries or any major means of survival for the people. Thus, the women had to rise to feed their hungry children. This was how the older women in Italy began to come to Benin to recruit women and girls. At first many of these young girls were deceived but with time it became an open secret in Benin that the jobs of these girls in Europe was prostitution. The boys were now also eager to make a living in Europe, thus from the early 1990s, the hope and aspiration of every young man in Benin was to migrate to Europe or have a girlfriend in Europe.

This was how Purray boys also found themselves in the trade. At this point everyone became involved: parents, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters, cousins, boyfriend, neighbours, pastors, African traditionalists, immigration officers and several others. This took the trade to another dimension as new routes were now also introduced; several girls and boys died in the desert of Libya and Morocco. Some were drawn in the sea trying to cross over to Europe. The dangers and mishaps of the trade did not prevent nor deter young people from travelling to Europe. The economic benefit remained the propelling factor. Some of them felt that if they could make it to Europe, their fortune will completely change. Thus, from the 1990s, there were already in Benin an organized network of traffickers and as the years went on, their numbers and categories have increased. At first, you only had those who sponsored girls to Italy directly through airplane. When it became difficult to sponsor girls to Italy directly, the traffickers began to send the girls through the eastern block of Europe while the newest group took their victims through Northern parts of Africa.

## **VI. The Economy of International Prostitution in Benin**

The economy of international prostitution in Benin deals with financial relevance of trafficking and international sex trade among the people.

It has become clear that the trafficking for sexual exploitation had continued to grow. Government and civil society organizations have put in place several strategies to reduce the hold of trafficking in Benin but to no avail. This is due to the important financial role it has continued to play in Benin. The questions are: Is Benin or Edo state the only state with economic crisis in Nigeria? Are Benin people the poorest in Nigeria? Then why has sex trafficking continue to thrive in Benin? From the information gathered in this field work, it became obvious that trafficking and international prostitution have remained the major back bone of the economy of Benin City for over three decades.

According to Oronsaye, international prostitution was the major sustenance of Benin economy for ten years, that is 1980 to 1990. He further explained that most families would have collapsed as poverty became the order the day. Major financial help now surfaced from family members who were abroad. In order to spread this new-found wealth, family members abroad "helped" sponsor other extended family members to Europe. It was regarded as help and nothing was wrong with it. This was how trafficking became entrenched in Benin families' system. The availability of traffickers or network of traffickers in Benin also encouraged the trade that even non-natives dwelling in Benin were also caught up in the web of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Aghatise also explained that since the mid-1980s, a large number of Nigerian girls and women have been trafficked into Italy to work as prostitutes. She further explained that:

"Some face violence and exploitation from their traffickers and "madams," some of whom were once trafficked themselves and now "buy" women of their own. The last few years have seen an increasing number of very young girls, in most cases minors, being trafficked to satisfy the ever more exigent requests of the clients. The debts imposed on the women and girls by their traffickers upon their arrival in Italy are large amounts which can range from US\$30,000 to approximately US\$60,000. The "debts" have to be paid in a matter of a few months, at the risk of violence being used on them and/or on their families in Nigeria by their madams. It should be noted that the girls charge an average US\$10/15 per client and at times, as little as US\$5."

The situation became more alarming in 1999 when hundreds of Nigerian girls were deported from Italy and other parts of the globe for

engaging in prostitution. It is pertinent to note that local prostitution evolved into international prostitution, which now metamorphosed into an organized network of sex trafficking. Aghatise, further explained that “Nigeria is the main country of origin for women and girls who are sold into prostitution in Italy. The highest number of trafficked women and girls into Italy come from Nigeria”. She contends that it is impossible to combat trafficking where prostitution is legalised and tolerated as this is the case in most European countries. From the above analysis of the debt to be paid by a trafficked girl, this clearly shows how much wealth traffickers can make from their victims. Thus in Benin, a new set of very wealthy women emerged who had made so much wealth from trafficking.

Benin City is one of the oldest cities in Nigeria. However, in recent times, the city which was well known all over the world for her artistic triumph and an intimidating aura of monarchy is today branded as the major sex Centre in Nigeria. It is said that over 80% of international prostitutes from Nigeria are of Benin origin. Thus, many have come to see the city as the “city of prostitutes”. Presently, the mere mention of Benin rings a bell of ‘prostitution’ in the minds of many. Benin women are now regarded as promiscuous, loose, licentious and unrestrained. In some quarters, they are a source of disgrace; while to others, they are heroines who have saved their families and people from the firm hand of poverty which pushed most of them out of their homes to such a hazardous trade like prostitution.

The cogent point to note is travelling abroad became very popular in Benin due to its financial relevance among the people. There are some basic necessity that is very important for a Benin man which was to own a house. In Benin it was very dishonoring for a Benin man to die and not have a house to be buried in. At the height of the economic crisis, most people could not afford two square meals per day, so affording to build a house became far from it. But when their daughters travelled out to Italy, they bought land and built modern houses for their parents who were in abject poverty. The more daughters you had abroad, the more wealth and affluent you had in the society. What they did abroad was no longer relevant but the end now justifies the means. Several parents began to encourage their daughters and wards to travel abroad to help the family. Thus, with the involvement of friends and immediate family members, trafficking took a new dimension in Benin.

Again, Benin had continued to practice polygamous family system from the pre-colonial to post-colonial period. After the death of the man of the house, his numerous wives were asked to move out of the house while his first son took over his major properties. Other wives without a son will be left with nothing. In situation where other wives had their own sons and the deceased husband only had one major



landed property, the tradition grants the right of ownership right over such property to the first son. Thus, for most Benin women, in the polygamous home where they found themselves, their only property was their children. After the demise of their husband, some of these women could not cope with the responsibility of providing for their family. Many of these women travelled abroad or sent their daughters abroad. As their daughters began to send money home, their financial situation changed. When this happens, it encourages another woman to also send her daughter. From the 1990s young teenage girls were sold into sex slavery by parents who did not understand the dangers and intricacies of the trade. Even after the 1999 saga, government and civil society leaders felt awareness and different campaign against trafficking for sexual exploitation in Benin could curb the situation. It now became so popular that a mother can have as many as five girls in different parts of Europe prostituting. Husbands now encourage their wives to travel abroad for prostitution. The result of the anti-trafficking laws was that it only made the trade more discreet.

In Oka in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area, where this field work was carried out, from the 1990s to the early 2000s, about 70% of modern houses built in the area were built with proceeds that came from trafficked girls from Europe. This area is a major hotspot for recruiting girls into trafficking for sexual exploitation. There are different kinds of traffickers available in the area and their wealth, properties, fame can easily lure young girls to their trap. While in the Government Reservation Areas, these women called 'troli or sponsorer' big time trafficker could account for very expensive properties. They lived in big mansions with fleet of cars like most politicians. The textile business in Benin was also dominated by them. They owned several choice hotel and different business in Benin. They had both wealth and political influences as they had different politician that were under their sponsorship. These women did not only gain wealth through trafficking, they also had influence. They created different social clubs where they can express themselves.

In this field work, 15 trafficked girls who were interviewed all agreed that they wanted to travel abroad in order to turn their families financial status around. Most of these girls were born into families with high level of poverty. Six of these girls were deported to Nigeria. Among these six girls, three are still very much ready to return to Europe to work for themselves. They contend that there is no job or business in Nigeria that will yield such profits or make them so wealthy. These girls had experienced sorrow and pain as a result of the violence and dangers of trafficking business. One of them even told me how the oath she took before she left almost made insane. Their argument is when they want to travel out again, they will no longer use trafficker but will work out their traveling document by themselves and also work for their own pocket. For them, their earlier slavery was

for the trafficker but now if they can find their way back to Europe, this time around to work as independent hustler. Only two among these girls opted to return back to school. These one are interested in getting University degrees. The older women were retired from the business while the ones that were interviewed in Italy through the telephone were still very much into it. Two returnees opted for business as another means of survival in Nigeria. The scholars that were interviewed during this research also agreed that poverty and a need for new economic status drove many girls into trafficking. Others posit that the change in value system also encouraged the trade. While some analyst contends that greed was a major driving force for this trade.

Purray boys that were interviewed and followed up also agreed to the fact that they all wanted to have Italo girlfriends in order to help their economic status. For those in Europe, they claimed that they could not get any good paying job but the women had several opportunities through their body. So they had to throw off their ego and share their women with other young men. As far as these women could provide for their needs, whatever they did with the white men did not matter at all.

**VII. Conclusion**

In pre-colonial Africa when trade by barter was the major means of exchange; nations equally barter goods due to natural endowment. Interestingly, women constituted the majority of the sold-out slaves in under royal supervision or monopoly of pre-colonial Benin as a result of the belief that they were not of much worth. Women of post-colonial Benin were once again sold out into sex slavery by their parents or husbands for economic purpose. It should be noted that in this era, most of the women were convinced to see the option of traveling out for sexual exploitation as the best option. Many were deceived and in turn deceived others into sex trade. For some, international sex trade is modern day slavery while for others, it remains the major source of economic development in the state. It is due to effective financial influence of the trade on the economic situation of Benin that gave rise to Purray boys.

The field works have gathered that the wealth that emanated from the trade has remained it greatest sustenance.

*PRIMARY SOURCES*

**Interviews**

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NAME\TITLE	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE
15 trafficked girls were interviewed	21-56	Female	Ex- international sex workers and current sex workers	Benin and Europe	2015-2016
Prof OB Osadolor	58	Male	Professor Of Benin History, University of Benin	At his office in the University of Benin	29-02-2014
Dr F.N Ogoanah	45	Male	Senior Lecturer, University	At his office in The University of Benin	29-02-2014
Nwoha C Roland	45	Male	Project Co-ordinator, Idia Renaissance	At his office in GRA	
Charles Agbonlahor	45	Male	Centre Administrator, Idia Renaissance	At his office in Benin City.	27-02-2014
Chief Osewengie Ero	82	Male	Traditional Chief. Historian, Linguist from the family of Ero the seventh kings maker.	At his resident in Benin City	16\03\2014
High Priest Ebohon, Osewengie	73	Male	Historian, native doctor, Proprietor Ebohon Centre for Arts, Traditional Religion & Witchcraft	At his resident, Ebohon Cultural Centre Benin City	30\06\2014
Prince Patrick O. Oransaye	62	Male	Son of Uvbi, member of Iwebo palace society Historian, Artist and image interpreter	At his office, in Isekuruhe of Benin compound	30-06-2014
Prof. Omoregie	82	Male	Historian, author of several Benin historical books, proprietor Osbo Academy, and study Centre for Ubinology	At home resident in Benin	15-3-2014
Dr Uyilawal Usanlele	54	Male	Professor of History at the State University of New York Authority in Benin History.	At the premises of Institutes for Benin Studies	11-7-2014

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