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## THE CONSTRUCTION OF SILENCE: NARRATIVES OF NIGERIAN WOMEN CROSSING INTO EUROPE

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• UNESCO Chair on Gender,  
Wellbeing and a Culture of Peace  
• University of Wisconsin-Madison, U.S.A.



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**Abstract:**

The trafficking of Nigerian women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a phenomenon that has been visible in Spain since the 2000s. One of the entry routes is the southern European border from Morocco to Spain where access to the protection system is linked to the identification of women as "victims" of trafficking by Spanish Security Forces. Such identification requires the women to narrate their life stories, despite the silence and concealment in which they find themselves, making their narration rather difficult. From a multi-sited ethnographic research and using an ecology of knowledge approach, we propose to analyze how women's silence is built within the Nigerian trafficking journey and how women confront this silence. Results show that, far from being anchored in the victim category as passive and disempowered subjects, women not only provide fundamental knowledge to understand the phenomenon of trafficking but also propose concrete actions for its transformation.

**Keywords:**

Trafficking of women, trafficking networks, gender, migration, Edo State, Nigeria, Morocco, Spain, yuyu, silence

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## Introduction

The term “trafficking in persons” has a long conceptual history (Solana, 2011). In the case of Spain, the arrival of young African migrants to the region began to take on importance in the 1990s, with the first complaints to the Ombudsman in 2008. This was regarding "the lack of adequate procedures to protect the victims who had been detected during a police operation "(Defensor del Pueblo, 2012: 11). Since then, Nigeria has been among the first “export” countries of young women trafficked for sexual exploitation in Europe. According to EUROSTAT (2016), the majority of trafficking victims registered by EUROPOL in Europe came from countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. However, in terms of sexual exploitation, Nigerian ranked as the second largest nationality (18%). In the case of Spain, following the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Trafficking of the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (Spanish acronym MSSSI, 2015), Romania was the country with the highest number of possible victims (32%), followed by Nigeria (27 %).

Since then, this important presence has gained strength. Many studies on the phenomenon have been carried out, especially by international organizations (OIM, 2006; ONU FEMMES, 2015; UNESCO, 2006; UNICRI, 2003; UNODC, 2018). Mansur (2017) points out that this has maintained a discourse that combines the rhetoric about human rights of "victims" in vulnerable situations and a defense of mobility control. On the other hand, the role in the production of information of organizations that work in the field is indisputable:

- Doctors Without Borders (French acronym: MSF, 2013 and 2010) on violence during the journey, specifically in Morocco;
- The reports of the Pro Human Rights Association of Andalucía (Spanish acronym: APDHA, 2018) regarding the southern border;
- Those of the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (Spanish acronym: CEAR) 2014;
- Celis and Álvarez (2017) addressing the specific situation of women in border contexts; or
- The report by Women's Link Worldwide (2014) that specifically highlighted Nigerian trafficking.

In Spain, the Ombudsman released in 2012 its first report on trafficking victims in Spain and a second document in 2013 where the shortcomings of the Spanish protection system are detailed. Due to all this work since the year 2000, primarily from civil society organizations, human trafficking in the Spanish context is identified and expressed as a problem that needs to be addressed.

## Trafficking in Human Beings within the "Victim" Category

The United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons is the first international instrument to define the phenomenon as based on acts, means, and ends. It is also included in the European Union Parliament and Council Directive 2011/36/EU, and which are translated into Spanish legislation as:

“(Whoever) uses violence, intimidation or deception, or abuses a situation of superiority or necessity or vulnerability of the national or foreign victim, or by delivering or receiving payments or benefits to obtain the consent of the person who possessed control over the victim, to capture, transport, transfer, welcome, or receive... with any of the following purposes: a) The imposition of forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, to bondage or begging. b) Sexual exploitation, including pornography. c) Exploitation to carry out criminal activities. d) The extraction of their bodily organs. e) Forced marriages (Art. 177bis of the Penal Code).”

Within the Spanish legal system, the Framework Protocol for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings establishes that a person could enter this category if they are identified as a victim of trafficking by the State Security Forces and Corps. This would allow access to the corresponding protection system. As Piscitelli and Lowenkron (2015) pointed out, the possible “victims” should be recognized as “real victims” since, if they were not, those of foreign origin could be labeled as “illegal immigrants” and, therefore (would be) deportable. Hence, as stated by Gatti and Martínez (2017), being a victim is a form of access to the citizenship status, so the issue of “inclusion/exclusion of who is considered a victim” (Piper and Montenegro, 2017: 104) is central to trafficking in persons. Recognizing someone as a victim of trafficking implies a period of recovery and reflection for this person due to their distance from the influence of the traffickers. During this period, the person must decide whether to cooperate or not with the authorities investigating the crime. This process, in addition, could end with the possibility of administrative regularization.<sup>1</sup>

Highlighting the fact that a very low percentage of the possible “victims of trafficking” are recognized by this statute in Spain<sup>2</sup>, and to obtain this recognition it is necessary to tell their life stories to competent authorities, we echo a question posed by Gatti and Martínez (2017) which is a clear parallel to the one posed by Spivak (1988) with respect to subaltern subjects: “Can the victims speak?”.

Narrative thinking, which consists of telling stories to oneself and to other people, is the oldest type of thinking (Ruiz, 2009). The possibility of storytelling in general terms is therefore not in doubt, but rather the social legitimacy of the story, the narrator, or the implications of the story narrative itself. The narrative exercise for people linked to trafficking (in our case Nigerians) is a confrontation with this phenomenon because it challenges established conditions so that they do not speak. Therefore, asking about the capacity of the victims to speak also implies questioning their ability to act. Following the analysis of collective action and social movements, victims

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<sup>1</sup> Modification of Article 59bis from the Organic Law 4/2000 of January 11, implemented by the Organic Law 10/2011, of July 27.

<sup>2</sup> In the Spanish state, people who are at high risk reached 13,983 in 2014 with only 153 people identified as victims of trafficking (Agirregomezkorta, 2016:109).

usually appear as subjects who lack agency and are burdened with passivity (Hartog, 2012). In the case of trafficking, this is accentuated within the collective imagination as a need to rescue them (Andrijasevic 2007; Russell 2014). Flamtermesky (2011) points out that it would appear that the agency of women in trafficking situations would have to go through various forms of collective action of the subjects, which is along the lines of the research conducted by Lefranc and Mathieu (2009) about victims in general. On the other hand, the author defends “this need for them to conform as a ‘group’ or (that a) NGO responds to the institution’s needs and not to their own... The women, individually, are and become a community, and as individuals they also create collective experiences” (Flamtermesky, 2011: 5-6).

In order to answer this question of the so-called “victims of trafficking” capacity to narrate and act, we build on Santos’ (2006) proposal made in “Sociology of Absences and Disclosures”. It states that “to make what is absent present, experiences that already exist but are invisible or not credible available; that is, (it is necessary) to transform absent objects into present objects...” (Santos, 2006: 26). He points out that, from the standpoint of “metonymic reason”, “what does not exist in our society is actively produced as non-existent, and that is why the biggest trap for us is to reduce reality to what exists” (Santos, 2006: 23). From this perspective, the knowledge of the Nigerian women with whom we have worked could fall within this category of delegitimized knowledge based on a Eurocentric and, we would say, patriarchal lens. This delegitimization occurs for several reasons. First, since they come from former colonies where genocide and epistemicide were practiced systematically for centuries (Grosfoguel, 2013). Secondly, since they are women, black, undocumented as well as linked to trafficking, and whose discourses and proposals have been especially silenced and made invisible (Andrijasevic, 2007, Aradau, 2008, Flamtermesky, 2015).

A fundamental objective of our work is to pinpoint, systematize and assess, with the women, the knowledge that they possess. With this objective, we begin with the theoretical concept of “funds of knowledge” which is defined as “those bodies of knowledge and skills, historically accumulated and culturally developed, essential for individual and family well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff and González, 1992: 133). Following this premise, the authors categorized different types of knowledge that they understood could be useful in school education, related to the maintenance and survival of the family, and supported by practices of reciprocity and trust. Reviving this proposal, we have carried out a careful re-examination process by working with the women and using their own discourse, to analyze and generate knowledge that contributes to the understanding of human trafficking. Based on the ideas of an “ecology of knowledge” (Santos, 2006), we propose to organize the knowledge provided by the women’s discourses using the “means” of trafficking included in article 177bis of the Spanish Penal Code, which include these categories: Violence, Intimidation, Deception, Power Abuse Situation, Vulnerability Abuse Situation and Delivery-receipt of payments (understood as purchase-sale). Following Piper and Montenegro ideas which are based on Haraway’s diffraction metaphor, our goal is “to produce understandings and explanations about the phenomena that can refute, diversify and complicate dominant discourses on a studied subject” (2017: 100).

For the case at hand, we seek diverse and complex ways of analyzing the reality of the Nigerian migrant women with whom we have worked, where the category “trafficking victim” appears as the dominant discourse and also as the only path for protection. Eliminated from this

perspective is knowledge as well as key and alternative recommendations in terms of trafficking that they have because, as Juliano (2000: 25) states:

“...the devalued sectors, included by the dominant culture in individual and homogenizing categories, generate their own interpretations of the world, which simultaneously continue and question dominant proposals, because by generating themselves as messages or as alternative behaviors, they subvert the presumed universality of the conceptual categories from which they are defined”.

In summary, the proposal of this article is based on the question of the possibility of speech and action of the “victims” (in this case of trafficking in human beings) and examines a double objective: from an ecology of knowledge perspective, to analyze the funds of knowledge as expressed by the Nigerian women with whom we have worked in relation to each of the means of trafficking, in order to understand how their silencing is constructed. On the other hand, we propose to locate how they confront these silences, subverting the universality of the victim category, based on what Santos (2006) calls “Sociology of Disclosures.”

## Methodological Proposal

The action research work carried out in this project is based on the approach to human trafficking on the Spanish southern border with North Africa. It has been guided by a double challenge: the territorial one, due to the importance of understanding the phenomenon at the various sites that make up the origin, path and destination of the migration route; and methodological, given the “discourse conditioners” that women face in order to talk about themselves, arranged in this way:

- Life stories marked by important episodes of assault and harm related to trafficking, which are what the Security Forces usually request while conducting their identification process of possible victims of trafficking.
- Threats to their lives or to people close to them at their point of origin and destination so that they do not talk about what they have experienced; including voodoo oaths as a way to establish the women’s commitment to the (trafficking) network.
- Construed stories that, provided by the trafficking networks, the woman can substitute for their (lived) experiences
- And the typical situation of administrative irregularity in which they find themselves and which results in, among other consequences, an estrangement from the official immigration sector and channels for fear of expulsion.

In response to the transnationality of trafficking, we have proposed a multi-sited feminist ethnography (Gregorio, 2017, Marcus, 2001). From a feminist perspective, we begin by dissolving the borders between the subject-knower and the object of knowledge, recognizing these young women as protagonists of the research process and, in this case, also of action. We also highlight the embodied narratives (del Valle, 1999) generated by these women whose discourses are rooted in their experiences. We speak, therefore, of a methodology that is recognized as a generator of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991) linked to the context and recognized from the subjectivity of those who emit it. The multi-sited approach has sought to retrace the land journey from 2014 to 2017 travelled by the women, where we established *camps* for meeting and joint analysis with them. This was thanks to the access facilitated by social organizations and institutions that serve them in each of the territories of the three studied countries: Spain (Cádiz, Huelva, Almería, Seville, Granada, Bilbao, Ceuta and Melilla); Morocco (Tangier, Rabat, Casablanca, Oujda and Nador) and Nigeria (Calabar and Benin City).

## Interviews and Artistic Tools

In order to address this methodological challenge, we decided to facilitate their discursive processes by using tools offered by artistic disciplines when interviewing the women. In this article, we will focus on the information provided by a body map that proposes to analyze the women’s life history in three chapters (origin, route, and destination), and represented by three human silhouettes. These silhouettes symbolize the women within the space-time that make up the chapters. We recommended that they self-reflect and self-narrate based on their lived corporeal experiences related to their health. Thus, we talk about their experienced care and harm, without directly addressing trafficking, aiming to minimize their exposure to risk. It is important to remember, following this line of thinking, the extent of danger for women who give any information about their situation in the trafficking network because of the threats to themselves and their families. From there, we recommended that they fill out these silhouettes with “embodied” discourse, such as the words, drawings, newspaper clippings, blank spaces, etc., then tell their stories. These narrative exercises have been carried out in group or individual workshops, depending on the circumstances in which the women find themselves, such as recovery from painful experiences, need for anonymity or a work of collective authorship, exploitation situation, etc.

In this article, we will analyze the knowledge generated from the work carried out with 13 women<sup>3</sup>, all of whom are Nigerian with different profiles (Table 1.0), and who have worked from the aforementioned facilitator body map for the production of life stories.

*Table 1.0: Characteristics of the participating women*

<b>Woman</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Trafficking Status</b>	<b>Access Site</b>
<b>B.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	19	Shelter center resident	Madam thinks victim is dead.	Granada, Spain
<b>A.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	18	Shelter center resident	Possible sexual exploitation.	Granada, Spain
<b>Bl.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	34	Intercultural mediator.	Not recognized as linked to trafficking.	Algeciras, Spain

<sup>3</sup> In order to meet ethical criteria based on the informed consent of all participants and due to the nature of this topic, access to the study subjects was adjusted continuously. This was to create safe conditions so that a strict confidentiality framework, previously agreed upon by all participants, was ensured. To safeguard their request for anonymity, we identify them by the initials of their names.

<b>Woman</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Trafficking Status</b>	<b>Access Site</b>
<b>G.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	24	Intercultural mediator.	Left the network	Algeciras, Spain
<b>J.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	34	Self-employed.	Not recognized as linked to trafficking.	Seville, Spain
<b>O.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	30	Shelter center resident.	Debt paid off to Madam.	Sevilla, Spain
<b>Bt.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	30	Lives in a migrant agricultural settlement.	Possible sexual exploitation.	Huelva, Spain
<b>S.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	30	Lives in a migrant agricultural settlement.	Possible sexual exploitation.	Huelva, Spain
<b>Bk.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	24	Lives in a migrant agricultural settlement.	Possible sexual exploitation.	Huelva, Spain
<b>Om.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	24	Lives in a migrant agricultural settlement.	Possible sexual exploitation.	Huelva, Spain
<b>M.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	30	Shelter center resident.	Returned from Italy. Left the network.	Benin City, Nigeria

<b>Woman</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Situation</b>	<b>Trafficking Status</b>	<b>Access Site</b>
<b>Je.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	20	Mendicancy.	In transit in Morocco.	Rabat, Morocco
<b>F.</b>	Edo State, Nigeria.	20	Mendicancy.	In transit in Morocco.	Rabat, Morocco
<b>TOTAL</b>	13 women				

Source: produced by the authors of this study

On the other hand, we have triangulated (Gibbs, 2012) the material generated by the women with the content of semi-structured interviews carried out with technical personnel from 21 civil society organizations, 7 public administration institutions and four key informants from the academic field (Table 2), that work directly in this area. To this, we add the informant interview which we consider essential since this person serves as a guide during the Nigerian journey.

*Table 2.0: Characteristics of the institutions whose personnel participated in interviews*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Public Administration</b>	<b>University</b>
<b>Spain</b>	8, migrant women assistance	5, targeting gender violence, migrant care and/or care for women	1, Law Area
<b>Morocco</b>	8, migrant women assistance	1, Ministry of Health	1, Law Area
<b>Nigeria</b>	5, work against gender violence and trafficking.	1, National Anti-trafficking Agency (NAPTIP)	2, Anthropology Area
<b>TOTAL</b>	21	7	4

Source: produced by the authors of this study

## Analysis Strategy

The analysis of the narratives, which came from the Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), started from the axial and open codification of transcriptions of generated discourses (Charmaz, 2005) in relation to the means of trafficking as defined above. Secondly, the researchers discussed the best possible attribution for each fragment in order to satisfy the requirements of completeness, mutual exclusion, homogeneity, objectivity and relevance (Krippendorff, 2013). Finally, following the same procedure, we identified subcategories within each of the means that were contrasted with the figure of “key reviewer”. One of the women in the group, who in addition to having lived the experience of trafficking, is currently a professional in the subject as an intercultural mediator.

The subcategories identified in this work are understood as systematizers of the different ways of creating the silences that uphold Nigerian trafficking. We discuss verbal silences (absence, control or distortion of discourse) and corporal silences (disappearance, concealment or physical control). The result of this epistemological dialogue is included in Table 3.0. These subcategories are arranged according to the three fundamental space-time stages such as origin, route and destination. Based on this system, we organize the data with an interpretative interest in two content blocks that respond to the objectives of this article: 1) how the silences are constructed and, 2) how the women and young people confront such silences.

*Table 3.0: Subcategories identified in the speeches from the means of trafficking in each stage*

	Origin	Journey	Destination
INTIMIDATION	What or who is applying the intimidation?		
	1. Yuyu <sup>4</sup> 2. Familial	1. Network 2. Yuyu <sup>5</sup>	1. Family 2. Yuyu 3. Madam/Boss/ traffickers
VIOLENCE	Who is committing the violence?		
	1. La familia	1. Trafficking agents <sup>6</sup> : • Guideman • Boss	1. Madam/Boss 2. Clients

<sup>4</sup> The women refer to yuyu as an entity in and of itself, although we assume that it is used as a manipulative tool by those involved in trafficking.

<sup>5</sup> The subcategories in blue are those that have appeared with less frequency and intensity in their discourses.

<sup>6</sup> The “guideman” is a guide during the journey, the “boss” is the person responsible for the migrants during the trajectory, the “chairman” plays an authoritative role in the settlement of the migrants along the migratory route and the “madam” is the woman, who normally is settled in Europe, who is in charge of bringing a young woman from the point of origin for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

	Origin	Journey	Destination
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman</li> <li>• Madam</li> </ul> 2. Compatriot <sup>7</sup> 3. Institutional: Police	
ABUSE OF POWER	Who abuses their power over them?		
	1. Family-daughter 2. Male-female	1. Guideman 2. Boss 3. Chairman 4. Madam 5. Compatriot 6. Moroccans 7. Police	1. Madam/Boss 2. Clients
DECEPTION <sup>8</sup>	What are the deceptions?		
	1. False information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Europe</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Work/exploitation</li> <li>• Route</li> <li>• Yuyu</li> </ul> 2. Omission of information	1. Route 2. Exploitation	1. Exploitation 2. Debt 3. Europe 4. Family in place of origin
ABUSE	What are states of vulnerability?		

<sup>7</sup> The women refer to the role of fellow countrymen in acts of aggression and abuse at certain moments of confluence along trafficking and migration routes.

<sup>8</sup> Deception undergoes a diminishing process from the point of origin (where it weighs heavily), during the journey when some of the deception becomes apparent, until arrival at the destination point where work situations and conditions are revealed.

	Origin	Journey	Destination
VULNERABILITY SITUATION <sup>9</sup>	Structural Vulnerability (S.V.) <sup>10</sup> : 1. Origin: • Benin City • Rural Zones 2. Age: minors and youth 3. Impoverishment 4. Lack of schooling <sup>11</sup> 5. Gender inequality • Family Structure • Destructuralization • Family Care	S.V.: 1. Irregular Migration: • Sea • Desert • Hiding Places 2. Gender Inequality • Pregnancy/children • Subject to Control • Protective Man/Assailant 3. Age and family care 4. Economic situation	S.V.: 1. Irregular Migration: • Return • Migrant Centers 2. Exploitation and Debt 3. Origin, Family Situation 4. Family Care
BUYING AND SELLING	Who conducts the transactions with the women?		
		1. Guide man 2. Madam	1. Madam/Boss

Source: produced by the authors of this study/self-generated

<sup>9</sup> The Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, considers those people who are particularly vulnerable such as minors and pointing to other factors such as sex, pregnancy, health status and disability. For the analysis of this article we do not focus exclusively on these variables, but on others which we call structural vulnerability.

<sup>10</sup> We understand structural vulnerability as states of discrimination and multiple subordination (Crenshaw, 1991) that especially affect certain population groups due to certain variables such as sex, age, social class, national and/or ethnic origin, disability, educational access etc., whose confluence aggravates or explains the disadvantage and/or privilege situation in which the individual and/or group is structurally found.

<sup>11</sup> Lack of schooling has its own category, although it could be under impoverishment, given the importance of lack of information and critical awareness in trafficking.

## Results

### How Silence is Constructed

#### Structural Vulnerability Susceptible to Abuse at Origin

The term “young” in front of “women” would be one of the outstanding characteristics of Nigerian trafficking as already indicated previously by both Hadjab (2016) for Spain or France, according to Lavaud-Legendre (2014). In fact, eight of the 13 women participating in this work left Nigeria as minors. Added to this, as a female participant points out, is the manipulation facilitated by the lack of information in collusion with unfavorable economic situations, and that “the people who come from Nigeria, they are from villages, they are not city people... it's the poor people you can control” (G. Spain, workshop, January 2017).

Vulnerability due to a lack of critical education and training at the point of origin is very frequent and is linked to the difficulty of access or continuity in the educational system. In addition to health and other social services, the education system has undergone significant privatization as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s, according to the NGO Girls' Power Initiative (GPI) coordinator. The result of this is the important lack of schooling that occurs mainly in girls, widely addressed by Tuwor and Sossou (2008) in the cases of Nigeria, Ghana and Togo. High school education, as stated in the Omorodion study (2009), is a period of special vulnerability for recruitment. Added to this, a family and kinship structure favors and accentuates existing gender inequality, placing the girl and the woman in a social place of lesser value than that of the male. It also places her at the service of the latter, as previously described by Ugiagbe, Eghafona and Omorogiuwa (2007) from the Edo State region and collected by the women's testimonies in our study. Kokunre Eghafona, an anthropologist from the University of Benin City explained it in the following way:

“In other Nigerian cultures, girls are viewed as equals with boys, and if I marry outside the region, I still belong to my family of origin. But in Benin City there is a Primogeniture and Inheritance Law... when the first male child is born, it is assumed that he inherits the father's properties. The sons are more valued because they retain the name... So, because of this, the woman is usually seen as someone who offers help. Applying this to the current situation, when the family is poor, it is the girl who is sent out, so that she can help the family (Eghafona, Nigeria, interview, August 2015).”

These conditions are the basis of the obedience system that favor an abuse of power status of women towards men and of daughters to parents, as mentioned by the women participants. However, the high migratory pressure, which in the case of female migration from Nigeria can occur within human trafficking, depends on other means such as deception to be understood. In our work we have detected that young women recognize that they lack clear information about how they are going to travel and what they are going to do in Europe. Coupled with this, the biggest deception they report is the image of a prosperous Europe that can provide them with education and work, where, according to the coordinator of the NGO Idia Reinassance, “money falls from trees, you open the faucet and there is fresh milk, that is the impression, that Europe is gorgeous” (Nwoha, Nigeria, interview, August 2015). Likewise, they repeatedly mention the fraud regarding

possible work in Europe: only one of them knew that she would engage in sex work, but she never imagined the level of exploitation and aggression that it entailed.

Finally, the intimidation exerted by the debt commitment rituals, mainly developed through voodoo or *yuyu* (although also found in Christian churches), also has weight at the point of origin. This is due to family pressure and is also upheld by the commitment that young women have towards the community. During the migratory journey, the community almost never responds exclusively to individual needs, as one of the participating women stated:

“The other people who have girls in Europe laugh at us. Then I have to do it so they do not laugh. Because if not, I remain poor. You have no choice so that we do not get left behind. If the community moves, we also have to move” (B1, Spain, workshop, January 2017).

## The Journey as a School of Silences

The migratory journey is also impacted by structural vulnerability, mainly for those who are immigrants travelling through irregular channels. This is noteworthy in the case of women who are under the constant overtones of travelling under cover and therefore invisible to any detection of trafficking along the way. Coupled with this exist two geographic enclaves linked to death: the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. The Sahara Desert presents challenges due to lack of water and food, high temperatures, and the possibility of disorientation and of the group losing its way. The crossing of the Mediterranean Sea is always accompanied by stories of shipwrecks and human losses: “My greatest happiness was to save myself from the sea. Many people have died at sea, you do not know where your sisters are because the sea is very big” (A. Spain, workshop, June 2015).

On the other hand, women mention the importance of “road babies”. Of the 13 participants, all of them had minors under their care or had gone through the experience of some pregnancy and/or abortion. One of the most indelible and constant “traces” left on the women participants is precisely the harm sustained on their bodies. Therefore, the situation of vulnerability cannot be understood without one of the other principal means of producing silence during the journey: abuse of power, violence, and buying and selling. These elements are the most widely referenced in studies and previous reports on the migration of African women in North Africa (CEAR, 2014, Herrera, 2013, MSF, 2010 and 2013, Women's Link Worldwide, 2014). In these circumstances, there are certain masculine and masculinized roles that repeatedly exert the violence, abuse of power, and intimidation in a specific way. The boss, madam, guideman, or chairman are the most oft-mentioned characters in terms of exerting or allowing physical and sexual aggressions (in addition to psychological aggression, more related to intimidation) at different moments during the journey. Among the places mentioned in their accounts, Maghnia (Algerian border with Morocco) stands out notoriously as a place where women often recount the assaults that they experience, in this case, from their fellow countryman: “When you arrive in Maghnia, in that place. Every man takes a woman. They force you to sleep with them. They do not care if you are a virgin, if you are pregnant or have your period. Men have to pay, and women have to sleep with men” (B. Spain, workshop, June 2015).

The repeated bearing-down on Nigerian women and girls during the journey, based on violence and extreme control, leaves an intentional mark that seems to have the function of

“school” that teaches necessary behaviors for subsequent exploitation. One of the women participants points out that women in Morocco “are locked up”: “men do not want them to go outside to lead their own lives (...) Also to humiliate them, because a woman there has no voice to speak, to make their own decisions” (J. Spain, workshop, March 2017).

A guideman summed it up clearly when asked about the differences between the migratory journey of a man and a woman:

“Women always come hidden, not like men. And another difference is that when women come, men say that they are good business because women come to Europe to pay. Another difference is that women cannot speak, but men can. The woman has nothing to say until she arrives in Europe” (Nigerian Journey Guide, Spain, interview, April 2016).

The “good business” that women generate is closely related to the difference between trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling, which in Nigerian migration converges with gender difference. The coordinator of the NGO GPI in Nigeria explained it this way:

“... when a trafficker helps a boy, he asks him to pay all the money in advance acting in this way as a trafficker. But when he helps a girl, she does not pay anything in advance: When she arrives in Europe is when it is expected that she work to give back a certain amount of euros that will be determined by her relationship with the trafficker” (Osakue, Nigeria, interview, August 2015).

The debt figures accumulated by Nigerian women range between 20,000 and 60,000 euros according to our field data. Added to this is the possible profit that can be obtained with the women during the journey, with the possibility of being sold and exchanged at different border points both by the *guideman* that takes them to Morocco and by the Madam herself once (the woman has arrived) at the destination point: “Do not believe the *guide men*. They tell you that from Nigeria to Morocco it takes a week. But they sell you to another madam and the madam can sell you to another person” (Je. Morocco, workshop, March 2015).

The result of these aggression, profit, and terror practices towards the women’s bodies allows the strengthening of another of the “traces” more deeply rooted in the female participants: the construction of an imaginary about the journey as unfeasible for one or several women if they are not affiliated with men who can be their guide or protector. One of the participants synthesized it in a very illustrative way: “They protect us, but now I am thinking that they do this so they can use us. But when one is going through this, fear keeps you from thinking, but now I know that they protect us, but at the same time they harm us” (G. Spain, workshop, January 2017).

## The Role of Intimidation at the Destination Point

At the journey’s end, or destination as we call it here, intimidation is the means that primarily instigates the absence of discourses among women and girls, as evidenced by the fact that fear is one of the emotions reported in their accounts at this stage. This is also due to the absence of their always hidden bodies since they are housed on the fringes of society or in exploitation. On the one hand, there is pressure exerted on Nigerian young women by what they call “yuyu” - which has been appearing since the point of origin and which at this moment receives

renewed force as the reality of exploitation becomes apparent. As pointed out by Dols (2013) and Nwogu (2008), some elements of voodoo religion are used to ensure control of the women. Specifically, they point to the ritual oaths conducted when the contract is sealed between the trafficker and the person who undertakes to pay the acquired debt under the agreed conditions. If this pact is broken, the consequences, according to these beliefs, can be diverse, ranging from death, illness, madness, etc. Hence, this oath acquires the hues of intimidation and a producer of silence among Nigerian girls as Van Dijk (2001) has previously analyzed in the case of women in forced prostitution in the Netherlands. According to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), around ninety percent of Nigerian girls who migrate to Europe have gone through this ritual (Wilmott, 2012). A woman, who was working as an intercultural mediator at the time of this investigation, explained to us that: “Here, too, when they arrive at the apartment (shelter), (we) try to help her calm down, so she is not afraid, because the girl who arrives usually practices voodoo before coming to Europe. They do voodoo, rituals, (where they) remove hair, panties, menstruation and threaten her family” (G. Spain, workshop, January 2017).

On the other hand, as we mentioned when talking about discourse determinants, the trafficking organization will coerce women by forbidding them to say anything related to its structure and often imposing an alternative account. This culminates into the moment when the exploitation begins, revealing all deception related to her upcoming activity to be carried out in Europe:

“When I arrive in Spain... On the third day (the madam) calls me and says sit down. I am afraid of her. She says, do you know what you're going to do here? I say: yes, your brother told me that I am here to pick tomatoes or take care of girls. She says, shut up. And she brings the condom and a (stick of) deodorant. She says, look and opens the condom and puts it on as if it were a cock. When I say what? She says, yes, you're going to be a prostitute. And I cry.” (O. Spain, workshop, April 2015).

One of the last modes of intimidation revealed by the women would be the intimidation exerted by the families at the point of origin. One of the girls notes: “Families do not know that it is not easy, and girls when they enter Europe just a month later, are sending money to their family and their family does not know where this money comes from, if it was stolen or if it was from the sale of drugs or selling your body to another man” (B. Spain, workshop, June 2015).

In destination, once again, the means are cumulative and complementary and are always reinforcing the vulnerability condition. Since these are immigrant women in an undocumented status, the constant risk of deportation is added. Therefore, there is the danger of finding oneself back at the point of origin with a debt to be paid and a family that will not always be able to face and/or accept this situation. Re-trafficking is a reality for those who are deported or returned to Nigeria without having paid their debt. That normally increases their distrust of police agencies, which as you recall are the only ones that can identify them as trafficking “victims” and can begin a possible protection and regularization process. A young woman who returned voluntarily to Nigeria after experiencing exploitation in Italy, summed it up in this way: “When I was in Italy, I used to send money to my brother. But now my brother does not even call me. He does not even care how I eat. When I called him telling him I was in Nigeria he told me I should go back” (M. Nigeria, workshop, August 2015).

Finally, it is important to add violence to the destination category, mainly institutional and/or political. Of the women that are currently in Spain, some have been there for more than ten years and still have not been able to legalize their undocumented status. Others, despite having “papers”, cannot find a job that allows them to leave the exploitation. Ten of them have opted to not talk to the police because they distrust that the system that will in fact allow them to work or not be expelled, and/or because of the threats they have received from the trafficking organization and. The minority of them (a woman who left the network and one who does not identify herself as linked to trafficking) have obtained temporary jobs as part-time mediators.<sup>12</sup>

All these issues are fundamental to the creation of silence for women that consequently result in significantly hindering her possible identification as a “victim of trafficking” by the Security Forces in Spain, the destination point. This also hinders her access to the “citizenship” status that provides access to certain rights (Gatti and Martínez, 2017).

### **How the Silences are Confronted: The Disclosures**

Santos (2006) points to the need to design a new horizon through a utopian imagination where disclosures appear, starting with the visibility of absences and silences. Along this line, Bruner (1991: 109) states it as “the dazzling intellectual capacity to imagine alternatives: to devise other ways of being, to act and to fight”. Tamayo (2011) locates this in social movements, global resistance struggles, social sciences, and science of religions. From our research perspective, the women indicate that “telling” is the main way to confront trafficking: “... first girls need to know the reality. That’s the first thing. Because the girls arrive with many promises, lies, deceptions. They have to know that, what is happening in Europe so they can make their own decisions” (G. Spain, workshop, January 2017).

Gatti and Martínez (2017) asked, “Can the victims speak?” while also examining their capacity for action. Based on the results offered in this paper and situating the question among those linked to Nigerian trafficking, we found that the discourses uncovered in our investigation to be emerging shouts which are intentionally aimed at singling out and subverting the situation that fuels human trafficking, which goes beyond their individual needs for identification, protection or legalization.

### **Disclosures of the Participating Nigerian Women**

These narrations have allowed us to generate fundamental knowledge about the different ways the Spanish Penal Code identifies the definition of trafficking as a crime in each one of the stages of the migratory process. At this point, we have analyzed what elements are of interest to understand how silence is constructed in relation to the means of trafficking. We understand these funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) provided as descriptive-explanatory disclosures from the moment they have been expressed and narrated so that the interlocutors (which in this case refers to us, the researchers), better understand the different contextual, localized and embodied forms

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<sup>12</sup> We want to point out that having two mediators in a group of thirteen women is not a proportionate representation of reality. We have encouraged both of them to participate in this study because of their dual profile.

(Del Valle, 1999) in which the various means of trafficking materialize and impact them in origin, journey and destination.

On the other hand, their stories have contributed concrete actions, which is why we propose to categorize them as proactive or confrontational disclosures. Among these disclosures, we find certain funds of knowledge put in place for their survival and well-being. Examples that we mention include:

- strategies for safeguarding their children, ranging from internment in religious centers where they can be cared for without losing guardianship, for women who are still in an exploitation status, and
- the creation of bonds of trust with Spanish families who take care of the minor while they are working or are in exploitation. This has been the strategy of two of the women currently outside the network. In the case of another young woman, she decided to give up guardianship of her child in order to protect him from possible reprisals so that she could escape from the network.

Another type of proactive or confrontational disclosures are those which are reflective in nature. An example of this is the questioning that some of them have reached about one of the most important intimidating tools, which are the consequences of the yuyu oath: "I do not believe that. If I do not want to pay, I will not die. There are many of my countrymen who died here in Spain, but if it was due to the yuyu, I don't know, many more would die" (O. Spain, workshop, April 2015).

Finally, and as a key motivator for the genesis of this article, there are the ruptures of silences of information for those who are already at the destination point and insist on their rights, as well as the girls at the point of origin: "But those poor people have the right to know who they are going to give their daughter to, what work she is going to do, what is expected from the girl" (Bl, Spain, workshop, January 2017). Hence, the recommendation of many of these women, the so-called "victims", proceeds precisely, as if it were an oxymoron: they recommend to "tell", even though the crime of trafficking itself is built on the restriction of narrative action. Given the opportunity and a space to speak, they crafted a stage for social discourse in which they have proposed as a fundamental objective: that their narratives contribute to the broader work of minimizing the possibilities that others, their "sisters" in Africa, should experience what they have experienced. In this interstitial crossroads (Del Valle, 1999) it is the word that heals, the word that denounces and the word with an intention for social transformation: "If I had money, I (would) go to Nigeria to talk to all the mothers. (From) church to church or village to village. So they know everything the girls are going through in Europe. When the girl says she is suffering, the mother does not believe it and then when she arrives in Europe the suffering continues, prostituting to pay the madam" (G. Spain, workshop, January 2017).

## Conclusions

Several works point to how the “victim” category, including trafficking, creates an ideal model upheld by passivity, submission and/or inaction (Flamtermesky, 2015; Hartog, 2012; Russell, 2014). We understand, therefore, that remaining uncritical of this category when working with Nigerian migrant women can be reductionist, as well as highlighting the possible depoliticization of these subjects (Piper and Montenegro, 2017).

From the results offered in this article, it is evident that Nigerian migrant youth and women are also carriers of multiple funds of knowledge. In their discursive action from other languages and from embodied and reflexive experience about their victimization process (Has, 2001), they show us that, beyond being silenced and silent victims, they are and can also be surviving women (Antolínez y Jorge, 2017; Agirregomezkorta, 2016) who are willing to contribute their knowledge. This knowledge includes ways to address trafficking and design intervention, confrontation, and prevention strategies. Thus, they have underscored the need to inform young people at the point of origin. This means to broach the topic of travel by land as a period of schooling that uses fear and where there are identified places of heightened aggression. They believe that at this juncture, competent institutions must intervene. Among other things, this also includes the great difficulty they have in "informing" the police, thus questioning whether the interview requesting specific data is the only strategy that should be used to identify them.

We conclude, therefore, that the Nigerian migrant women participating in this work have played a leading role in the critical analysis of this subject due to their individual and collective experiences; as well as in the establishment of thematic approach strategies of this topic, in addition to exercising the role of political agents for social transformation..

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