

Far from Eden :

A brief study on the situation concerning African prostitutes in France

Introduction

The situation concerning African prostitutes in France is incredibly complicated as it involves human trafficking, coercion, violence, high-end prostitution, hardcore pornography, and a pervasive racism that is entrenched within each tier of the trade. The socioeconomic realities within the nations that supply the majority of the immigrants actively influence the sex market as pimp networks are able to easily recruit women wishing to travel to Europe to escape hardships within their own nations.

Political turmoil, stressed economic realities, and limiting cultural and religious practices greatly impact the opportunities that African women are able to access. It's dangerous to construct sweeping generalizations but the phenomenon of African prostitution in France is greatly influenced by the conditions in the nations that have become the primary suppliers of African prostitutes in France.

It is estimated that 80% of the prostitutes in France are of foreign origins. Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa are the main source regions. Populations of African prostitutes in France continue to experience dramatic growth rates and their presence as an immigrant population is far from static. In 2000, African prostitutes comprised approximately 10% of France's prostitute population. In 2003 the figure had grown to 27.5%.¹ These types of statistics provide the stark proof that African prostitution in France is a growing trend and that it is encouraged by fierce demand.

I - Before Immigration

1. Socioeconomic, Political, and Religious Realities

In order to understand and adequately examine prostitution in France as it relates to African immigrant populations, it is necessary to first consider the socioeconomic realities of the African nations that "supply" the vast numbers of African prostitutes in France. Both classical and relatively modern trends of immigration can be identified and just as the world witnesses the expansion of global markets and new forms of exchange, it too must grapple with the exponential growth of human trafficking and exploitation. Several African nations, primarily with histories of French colonial presence, have become breeding grounds for pimping networks that supply the demand in France. Criminal networks of pimps trick, coerce, and take advantage of women and children in a social reality that already lends itself to immigrant aspirations. The brutal reality of European colonial exploitation has indeed affected the socioeconomic state of Sub-Saharan nations. Poverty, illiteracy, and political unrest spur the instability that plagues many of the countries that these fragile individuals flee.

Civil Rights, Religion, Traditions

Women living in North and Sub-Saharan Africa are often excluded from the vote and general civic participation.² Vague religious and cultural references are manipulated to justify the subjugation of women. Women find their rights systematically compromised by corrupted structures. It is naïve however to consider the entirety of Northern or Sub-Saharan Africa as homogenous regions. The situation is extremely complex. Many factors contribute to the flourishing of pimping networks in African nations and the trends of immigration and human trafficking. It is necessary to consider corrupt and

¹ Matiada Ngalikpima, *L'esclavage sexuel : un défi à l'Europe* (Paris : Fondation Scelles and Les Editions de Paris, 2005), 46.

² Sophie Besis, « Les droits civils des femmes en Afrique : subsaharienne et dans le monde arabe », in *Le Livre Noir de la condition des femmes*, ed. Christine Ockrent and Sandrine Treiner (France : Editions XO, 2006)

instable political systems, the theft of civil liberties, and the manipulation of religious doctrine when observing the phenomenon of trafficking networks and African prostitution in France but it is imperative that one avoids constructing sweeping generalizations about the total misery of North African and Sub-Saharan women.

Sub-Saharan Africa is incredibly diverse. Islam reigns as the most popular religion but there is also a significant Christian presence. Centuries of Ottoman rule and pervasive colonial occupation have left lasting influences. Direct and indirect colonization has established the blazing image of European power and omnipresence which supplies both malice and fantasy. Colonial exploitation has had a profound influence on the histories and current conditions of Sub-Saharan Africa but in spite of the unifying history of colonial presence, the region remains incredibly diverse.

Islam is the main religion in the Sudanese-Sahelian zone while colonial intervention has ensured a Christian following in central and southern Africa.³ In lieu of colonial traces of juridical systems, languages, and customs and their interaction with already existing religious and cultural practices, women find their civil rights and liberties in a whirlwind of complicated and often conflicting ideologies. Although there has been some modernization of traditional familial structures, it is rare that the majority of women in any given community exercise an equal status. Even without considering the theft of civic liberty, frequent cases of female genital mutilation and domestic violence speak to the turbulent social reality that women endure.

Although the majority of African prostitutes in France come from Sub-Saharan regions, there is a significant population of women who have emigrated from countries such as Tunisia in the Arab world. Here Islam prevails, but multiple interpretations of the religion and instances of contradictory laws render the situation, once more, incredibly complicated for women in these areas. The complexities of the Islamic world can indeed offer valuable insights into the status of women living in Africa and the reality some women face before they become prostitutes in France, however much can be derived from just a few brief examples. One can consider examples such as the legal advances in Tunisia and the CEDAW in order to better understand the current situation women face in North Africa.

CEDAW, the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women helped ratify new laws in Arab nations that had previously followed the constraints of the Sharia (referring to Islamic law) more closely than any political efforts concerning gender equality.⁴ Although the articles of the Convention were adopted by some nations, others held out on grounds that the articles strayed too far from the Sharia. Implemented in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, the Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" and requires that nations make the following pledges:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.⁵

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* 331

⁵ United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

The Convention stipulates the State's responsibility to take action against human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and was the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women. It also recognizes that cultural traditions have a significant and influential role in shaping the identities of women and their own understanding of their gender.⁶ Some North African nations have adopted a reformation of familial law and have experienced a great deal of familial "modernization." Others have chosen to operate with an almost heightened conservatism and women in these nations are strictly governed.⁷

In her examination of the civil rights of women in Sub-Saharan and Northern Africa, Sophie Bessis argues that just as religion operates to heavily dictate the status of women in the Arab world, it is the "coutume", traditional customs that have the heaviest influence in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸ Although there are radical Islamic groups who follow extreme interpretations of the *Sharia* and as well as a strong Christian presence in these nations, cultural customs and traditions are some of the strongest forces upholding practices such as polygamy even though it is heavily reprimanded by the Church. Besides a short list of exceptions including South Africa and Cape Verde, women are heavily disadvantaged by the legislation in Sub-Saharan nations.

Besides South Africa and Cape Verde, no country in Sub-Saharan Africa has achieved full legal eradication of polygamy.⁹ Female genital mutilation, FGM, is another common practice. Female genital mutilation, also referred to as "female circumcision" or "female genital cutting," encompasses several distinct procedures ranging from the partial removal of the clitoris to extensive tissue removal. The most extensive form of female genital mutilation is infibulation with excision. This type of FGM accounts for about 10% of all FGM procedures in Africa.¹⁰ Female genital mutilation can be incredibly brutal and often occurs without the use of anesthesia. This practice can have lasting effects including psychological trauma, extreme pain, chronic infections, abscesses, complications giving birth, and infertility.¹¹ Although female genital mutilation does not necessarily eliminate all pleasure during intercourse, it makes it incredibly difficult for a woman to achieve an orgasm and has a profound impact on the way in which a woman is able to understand and explore her sexuality. Female genital mutilation is a clear example of a societal practice, fiercely justified with pleas of tradition and custom that directly combats a woman's ability to exercise her role as an equal in society.

Female genital mutilation among women aged 15-49, 1998-2003 (%) (Source: UNICEF, *The State of World's Children 2005*)

Country	Total Women ^a	Urban	Rural	Total Daughters ^b
Benin	17	13	20	6
Burkina Faso	72	82	70	40
Central African Republic	36	29	41	-
Chad	45	43	46	-
Ivory Coast	45	39	48	24

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Sophie Bessis, « Les droits civils des femmes en Afrique : subsaharienne et dans le monde arabe », in *Le Livre Noir de la condition des femmes*, ed. Christine Ockrent and Sandrine Treiner (France : Editions XO, 2006), 335

⁸ *Ibid.* 343

⁹ *Ibid.* 347

¹⁰ World Health organization media center, "Female Genital Mutilation," World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/index.html>.

¹¹ Marie Vlachovd and Lea Biason, eds., *Women in an Insecure World: Executive Summary*, (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005), 10.

Egypt	97	95	99	50
Eritrea	89	86	91	63
Ethiopia	80	80	80	48
Ghana	5	4	7	-
Guinea	99	98	99	54
Kenya	38	23	42	11
Mali	92	90	93	73
Mauritania	71	65	77	66
Niger	5	2	5	4
Nigeria	19	28	14	10
Sudan	90	92	88	58
Tanzania	18	10	20	7
Yemen	23	26	22	20

^a Women : the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 years of age who have been mutilated/cut.

^b Daughters : the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 with at least one mutilated/cut daughter.

Female genital mutilation occurs in at least twenty-eight countries.¹² Although some countries such as Burkino Faso have made legislative advances in response to FGM, the phenomenon is widespread and legislators across the African continent have failed to make any radical legislative victories. It is especially important that one consider cultural practices such as female genital mutilation when attempting to understand the social realities of African women who become prostitutes in Europe. Such practices, gender based legislation, and the manipulation of religious doctrine work together to create an incredibly difficult situation for many African women.

2. An apt example: An examination of Cameroon based on the Report presented at the Paris Conference in 2008 by Chief Superintendants, Republic of Cameroon

Exploring the specifics of the situation in Cameroon, the pimping networks that operate there and the state of the women who choose to emigrate to Europe or who are coerced or forced to emigrate, helps shed light on larger, more general patterns concerning African prostitutes living in France. According to statistics provided by the French Minister of the Interior, Cameroon is, far ahead of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the leading “supplier” of African prostitutes in France.¹³ The Exposé presented by Chief Superintendants at the conference in Paris in 2008 “La traite des êtres humains d’origine africaine à des fins d’exploitation sexuelle” (Human trafficking of African peoples for the purpose of sexual exploitation) provides valuable and detailed information on the situation in Cameroon.

Not as prevalent in the 1980’s, trafficking in persons for reasons of sexual exploitation grew significantly in the 1990’s in lieu of the economic crisis. Increases in sexual trafficking in recent years can also be attributed to the explosion of new technologies and global communication via Internet networks. The Internet has permitted pimps to network internationally. The Internet has played a huge role in the development of pimp networks between Cameroon and Europe.

The work of Non-governmental and other international organizations has greatly helped the Government of Cameroon to develop official policies and judicial practices that attempt to deal with issues of human trafficking efficiently. The law n. 2005/15 of December 2005 deals with the trafficking of children and defines criminal activity as including the recruitment, the transfer, and the accommodation of trafficked children. Charges of fraud, deceit, abuse of authority, profiting from the vulnerability of the victims, accepting payment for aiding traffickers, and other forms of exploitation are all associated with

¹² *Ibid.* 11

¹³ Matiada Ngalikpima, *L’esclavage sexuel : un défi à l’Europe* (Paris : Fondation Scelles/Les Editions de Paris, 2005), 46.

the broader crime of illegal trafficking. Although the definitions associated with this law are limited to children, other United Nations initiatives have begun to target women who are no longer minors. Cameroon has also altered its penal code to incorporate more comprehensive charges against pimps and pimp networks.

Pimp networks in Cameroon operate locally, regionally, and internationally. Internal networks work primarily between the cities of Douala, Yaoundé and Kribi. Regional networks operate between Cameroon, Nigeria, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. International networks operate most frequently between Cameroon and European countries (France being one of the main destinations). It is important to note here that these pimp networks shift to fit the demand at every level. African women are being prostituted at the local, regional, and international level and networks of pimps often work together to traffic women and children between the networks.

Many young people living in areas that are characterized by rural poverty face limited opportunities in the agricultural sector. Young people move to city centers hoping to make a better life for themselves. They leave areas dominated by agricultural work where commodities are purchased at devastatingly low prices. Pimp networks take advantage of women with these types of backgrounds. Working to supply the demand of large cities, pimp networks recruit women aged between 10 and 20 years. The recruitment of the victims that are prostituted locally varies, involving several different methods.

- Young girls often travel to large cities under the guardianship of a family member in the hopes of pursuing education and work opportunities. The girls are then forced away from their initial objectives and are exploited as prostitutes or domestic servants.

- Young orphans are promised an apprenticeship. They generally come from rural areas and are put in the charge of friends of the dead parents in the city. The children are then exploited in prostitution networks.

- Ignorance or desperate states of poverty prompt parents to give up or sell their children to people who go on to exploit them.

- A middleman places young boys and girls in employment. The middleman receives the pay as they are sexually exploited and then pays a percentage of the money back to the family. The employers are generally the owners of bars and restaurants, hair salons, hotels, nightclubs, etc. This type of recruitment often gives way to international trafficking.

A study conducted by the Cameroon Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (CASPCAN) in 2005 involving 800 girls concluded that 42.96% got involved in prostitution through friends, 29.90% were prostituted by a member of their family, 15.46% became prostitutes by their own volition, 8.59% were recruited directly, and 3.09% were prostituted by friends of their parents.

Fierce networks have developed between Cameroon and other African nations. The majority of the trafficking activity happens between Cameroon, Gabon, Nigeria, and Equatorial Guinea. Although international trafficking is a massive phenomenon, there are still many difficulties associated with obtaining visas and more and more women are being prostituted in regional networks that escape the complexities of transporting victims to Europe.

Of course Europe, most notably France, is still a major destination and the subject for this examination. International pimp networks are established most forcefully in the cities of Douala, Yaoundé and Kribi. In terms of trafficking to France, most of the trafficking occurs between these major cities and the regions of Paris and Lyon. Just as recruitment practices for victims intended for local prostitution varied, there are also several methods of recruitment and coercion at the international trafficking level. In terms of pimp networks that operate between Cameroon and France, the methods for recruitment include the following:

- *Cyber Cafés*. Through the Internet, victims develop relationships with pimps that are recruiting under the guise of “friendly” identities. Once contact has been established, the disguised pimps begin to

take the actions necessary to bring the ignorant victims to Europe. Once in Europe, the victims' passports, identification, and travel documents are confiscated and they are forced into prostitution rings.

- *Marriage Agencies*. The majority of false marriages that bring women to Europe are the result of the cooperation between pimp networks and marriage agencies that have become their accomplices.
- *Tourism*. Pimps exploit girls for sexual tourists.
- *False papers*. The demand for visas is incredibly high. The fabrication of visas and passports has enabled pimp networks to traffic many women who rely on them for entry into Europe.

These are just some of the methods that international pimp networks utilize in order to prostitute African women in France. These networks are able to thrive and expand because of some of the socioeconomic conditions previously mentioned. Rates of poverty and unemployment have escalated since the economic crisis of the early 1990's. Men, unable to find legal employment, turn to pimping and the administration of pimping networks for income. Women, entrenched in the same conditions of poverty and unemployment are victims of coercion or else are forced into prostitution by sheer desperation. The Internet has also permitted pimp networks to recruit victims quickly and efficiently. The Government of Cameroon is making legislative and juridical efforts to combat the situation of trafficking in and from Cameroon but the situation is incredibly difficult to manage. The Report presented at the 2008 conference in Paris outlines the legislative action that Cameroon has and plans to enact. The information detailed in this report is incredibly helpful in understanding the reality of African women prostituted in France.

II. The Reality in France

Pimps recruiting girls from African families, through the Internet and off the street, continuously make the same false promises. They manipulate the image of a better life in the mysterious, looming French nation. They promise young girls and women that they'll be able to work as housekeepers, nannies, and waitresses. Once in France, the pimps insist that the money it took to get them there, the money they spent for their passage to Europe from Africa, must be reimbursed. It must be reimbursed with the money from acts of prostitution. In a strange new country, having had their travel and identification documents confiscated, these African immigrants are trapped in the lie that brought them to Europe. And so, systematically, young girls and women are thrown into the hellish reality of forced prostitution in France.

There are three major networks of traffickers. The Mafia of Eastern Europe controls a sizeable part of the trafficking market. Previously harboring "moral" standards that did not permit profiting from the exploitation of women and children, the Mafia of Eastern Europe has discovered an incredibly lucrative business in the arena of sex trafficking where they face less risk and consequence from law enforcement officials than they do in the drug and arms trade.¹⁴ The second network originates from China and the third from Ghana. Managed in part from a distance by businessmen based in Africa, this network is extremely hard for police to persecute and involves sex, drug, and arms trafficking. This network, recruiting girls in many different African nations as noted before, is the main supplier of African prostitutes in France.¹⁵

1. Types of Prostitution

Not all African prostitutes in France are involved in the same type of prostitution. There are those who prostitute themselves occasionally, those who identify as "escort girls" and associate with clients

¹⁴ Amély-James Koh Bela, *La prostitution africaine en Occident : Vérités-Mensonges-Esclaves* (France : Editions CCINIA Communication, 2005), 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

who pay much larger sums than the average customer, and also those who are literally enslaved in clandestine prostitution rings with little hope of ever escaping. It is important to note however that although the “severity” of the conditions may vary, there is physical and mental abuse that exists at each level of prostitution.

1.1 Prostitution by Students for Necessity

There are women who choose to prostitute themselves without the direct coercion or influence of pimps and prostitution rings. Although these women are not the immediate victims of trafficking, they are often met with similar forms of violence and some eventually become full time prostitutes. The decision to prostitution oneself is not slight. The decision alone suggests the difficult conditions that these women face prior to becoming prostitutes. Young African women studying in France are met with an array of social, financial, and political challenges. Receiving little help from their embassies and ambassadors, rejected by their prefectures, and often losing the bulk of their scholarships, many young students turn to prostitution in order to remain in France for their studies.¹⁶

Women with lost or insufficient scholarships are forced to find alternate forms of income in order to support their studies and survive in France. Finding work is incredibly difficult especially with the time constraints of being a student. Young students often turn to prostitution for survival. Initially, this form of prostitution is meant to supply income occasionally. Students prostitute themselves to pay for rent, transportation, books, clothes, toiletries, etc. These are immediate costs that can be addressed by a more random and spontaneous form of prostitution.

Although some women are able to continue this type of “occasional” prostitution, many young students ignore the necessary hygienic precautions and accept abusive clients and contract fatal diseases. Some are not able to escape prostitution after their haphazard entrance and become drug addicts or dropouts and continue to prostitute themselves long after their careers as students. Nevertheless, for a large portion of young women, this type of occasional prostitution permits them to aid their families in Africa and purchase material goods that construct the illusion of a higher social standing. Without the presence of a pimp or manager, these young women feel more independent and in control of their lives as prostitutes. This lifestyle is however, completely dependent on a dangerous and precarious “métier.”

The demand of the Sugar Daddy

Young African women are an incredibly desirable “commodity” for elderly men who crave an exotic sexual adventure in their old age. Young prostitutes of all races often encounter the phenomenon of the “sugar daddy” and the possibility of winning a large profit from entertaining the fantasies of these elderly men. Having the ability to dispense large amounts of money on gifts, trips, and expensive hotels, these elderly men secure the companionship of young women who are installed at their sides for their constant indulgence.

Knowing that these men are often very ill, young prostitutes remain by the sides of their seniors in the hopes of collecting a large parting gift at the time of their deaths. Many of these sugar daddies even go as far to marry their infantile companions to ensure their exclusivity. In these cases, the young women profit greatly as they have access to various marital benefits. The family members of these elderly men often protest these legal unions. Old enough to be their grandparents, the relationships between these sugar daddies and their young companions are seldom viewed as marriages with more substance than pure sexual intrigue. Sometimes forty years their senior, the elderly men that take young lovers in exchange for money are not even able to participate in lively sexual acts as they risk heart

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 22

attack or stroke. It is the intrigue, the presence of these young women, which sustain many of the oldest sugar daddies.

Experiencing new lifestyles of temporary wealth, the young women who profit from their sugar daddies sometimes turn to the exploitation of other women. Building their repertoires of contacts and acquaintances, young women living under the “care” of their sugar daddies sometimes traffic other prostitutes, collecting and keeping a portion of their profits for themselves.¹⁷ Sometimes with, but often without the approval of their sugar daddies, these paid companions become pimps who profit from the prostitution of their peers.

Prostitution “de luxe” and the mysterious “escort girl”

Bathed in intrigue, glamour, and myth, Prostitution “de luxe” or “luxurious” prostitution is a lucrative market that has been thoroughly traversed by African prostitutes. These women, for the most part, prostitute themselves without the presence of a pimp. Although the majority of these young girls and women work without “management,” managers of the high-end bars and hotels that they frequent sometimes oversee their activity. These managers point potential clients in the right direction, or prevent unwanted customers or those who simply cannot afford the services. The individuals involved in this type of prostitution advertise on the Internet, obtain references through their existing clients, and create contacts on their version of “the street,” most frequently expensive nightclubs and hotels.

Prostitution occurs at every socioeconomic level of society. This type of prostitution contributes greatly to the revenues of the broader sex-market. These women advertise a menu of services, the lowest price generally hovering just over 3,000 € climbing quickly to 1,000 € for approximately 2 hours with a client.¹⁸ As prices escalate, one encounters the phenomenon of the “escort girl.” “Escort girls” are available for entire evenings, often accompanying clients to dinners, fundraisers, and other high-end events where the men are in need of their “plus one.” These young, glamorous companions, sport expensive costumes as they play the role of the “escort” and their identity as prostitutes is often not fully realized by the guests at the events they frequent.

As it occurs at many levels of prostitution, African prostitutes “de Luxe” and “escort girls” emphasize their race as a means to attract their clientele. Many clients at this level search for nights of fantasy with women they find to be exotic and mysterious. There is a high demand for the alluring exoticism that clients see in these African women. In his investigation of African prostitutes in Paris, Oliver Enogo has published several real advertisements that various prostitutes have published for their services. The advertisements are coated in promises of eroticism, the unforgettable experience of being with a strong and exotic Black woman, and a description of services that hesitates at vulgarity but is certainly detailed.¹⁹

There also exists a very high level of “security” within this tier of prostitution. The women are very selective when choosing their clientele and they often test them for sexually transmitted diseases before agreeing to meet with them. It is rare that these prostitutes see more than one client per day and are meticulous when it comes to their own hygiene, dress, and presentation. In a way these prostitutes become actresses, transforming themselves into the exact images that the fantasies of their clients demand.

It is a dangerous and false assumption to imagine this form of prostitution without physical and mental abuse. Although these prostitutes have relative control over which clients they engage with, violence is not immune to this high-end market. Some men don’t even pay for sexual services; they simply want company for an evening. But others, initially friendly, harbor perverted and violent sexual

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 24

¹⁸ Olivier Enogo, *Les Filles Africaines de la prostitution : Mémoires d'une enquête* (Paris : Editions Ccina Communications, 2007) 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 34

demands. Also, as high-end prostitutes gain more and more power, some even turn to prostituting their peers who wish to enter the high-stakes game, collecting a commission for the services of other women.²⁰ There is exploitation at every level of the market, and some women, even as they themselves are exploited, find ways to profit from others.

Marriage first, then Exploitation

Many families in both Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa take on the responsibility of finding husbands for their daughters. Often financially desperate, the prospect of a potential European husband is incredibly enticing and family members are quick to accept offers that they view as being financially advantageous. Families publish announcements in newspapers and on the Internet and are often met with several offers. Once in France, hoping for a life of opportunity, education, and romance, these women find themselves thrown into a life of frequent prostitution enforced daily by their new husbands. Terrified of being sent back to their countries of origin and of being rejected by their families, these women endure this form of slavery.²¹

Marriages between young African women and European men are also facilitated by Internet sites that work to appeal to both parties. Desperate for the myth of European wealth and opportunity, young African women subscribe to these sites en masse. On the other end, a collection of perverts, pimps, and criminal networks facilitate contact with these women. The time between the initial contact and the voyage to Europe can be incredibly short. Pimp networks, working through false figureheads, are incredibly experienced at manipulating embassies and securing visas for their future “brides.” When an embassy is unwilling or too slow to comply, dealers of false travel documents are ready to supply.

These women never experience any sort of real marriage with their European husbands. Treated like animals, raped, and forced to participate in traumatizing sexual acts almost immediately, new African “brides” in France are objectified and receive no respect from the men responsible for their voyage to Europe. Viewed as “machines of pleasure,” these women are often only wanted for their sexual services and are not even allowed to sleep in the same bed as their husbands.²² This type of abuse could be prevented with the use of more vigorous screening procedures on the part of the marriage agencies that supply the contacts. Although there is some direct cooperation with marriage agencies and pimp networks (as well as false agencies completely managed by pimps), many agencies and Internet networks are too concerned with turning a fast profit than with conducting background checks and securing the safety of their customers. Pimps, criminals, and perverts are all free to make offers through marriage agencies and await the speedy delivery of their new African brides.

The trafficking of minors and familial ignorance

This, “familial” tier of prostitution is incredibly difficult to track and police as it is an underlying phenomenon that happens frequently but is extremely difficult to detect. Family members entrust their daughters to neighbors, cousins, spouses, friends, and other family members to take their girls to Europe to show them greater opportunity. These families are ignorant of the harsh reality that they are literally pushing their young daughters towards. Young girls enter France with the pretense of obtaining an education and are then betrayed by their chaperones and forced into prostitution.

France requires that minors stay in school till they are sixteen. This doesn’t stop these familial acquaintances from prostituting the girls at night and on the weekends. It is estimated that these girls see one to two clients per evening (this figure grows during weekend periods) but it is impossible to rely

²⁰ Amély-James Koh Bela, *La prostitution africaine en Occident : Vérités-Mensonges-Esclaves* (France : Editions CCINIA Communication, 2005), 41.

²¹ *Ibid.* 35.

²² *Ibid.* 35.

fully on these statistics, as the phenomenon is a clandestine one.²³ Another element that makes this tier of prostitution difficult to regulate and collect information on is that the majority of the “chaperones” are females. In order not to draw attention to themselves and their “business,” these women receive male visitors under the guise of male friends and relatives. Men visit their private homes and apartments as unassumingly as possible as not to alert the neighbors and surrounding business owners.

One of the most horrific elements of this type of prostitution is the destroyed familial trust that these young girls endure. They find themselves physically and mentally exploited by figures they previously had seen as mother figures. In order to satisfy the demands of the client, the female overseers often engage in the sex acts as well. Not only are these minors being exploited sexually, but also they are being forced to take part in orgies that involve their chaperones. This experience is traumatizing at each level. As the chaperones send money to the families back in Africa, a tight web of deception is consistently enforced and spurs families back in Africa to testify to the advantages of sending their daughters to Europe to study and search for greater opportunity.

Some girls flee these situations of bound sponsorship and attempt to finish their studies in France. Some are able to obtain residence cards and find other work to sustain their living and education costs. Other however, already familiar with the world of prostitution, continue to prostitute themselves independently in order to pay for their educations. In many cases, these girls end up dropping out of school completely and are then taken advantage of by pimps who confiscate their papers and install them permanently in prostitution rings in France. These pimps manipulate the girls with threats of violence and deportation. But the pimps don't just threaten violence. There is a consistent cycle of sexual and physical abuse that works systematically to ensure the subjugation of these young women.

2. The hell of the trafficked

Women in African fall victim to pimps and criminal networks at frighteningly high rates. With 80% of prostitutes working in France being foreigners, there is a serious demand for African women in the French market. Promised jobs as housekeepers, waitresses, and nannies, African women follow pimps to France in order to secure greater opportunities. Many of these women also hope that they might even be able to secure a degree simultaneously. The allure of Europe is grand and they manipulated away from detecting the reality that awaits them.

Immediately upon arrival, the pimps confiscate passports and identification papers. When the women begin their violent protest, the pimps threaten them physically and explain that they must work as prostitutes in order to reimburse the money it took to facilitate their passage into Europe. These African women find themselves in situations of instantaneous debt where they have been manipulated to commit terrifying acts and hand over the revenues to the pimps who enslave them.

Women are forced to watch pornography in order to preview their future occupation. The pornography is degrading, often very hardcore, and traumatizes these women who have in many cases, never seen anything like the acts they're being forced to observe. After observing, they are tested. Raped multiple times by the pimp and sometimes by his friends or co-workers, the woman's “abilities” are assessed and she is “placed” accordingly. The “ugliest” women or the women who are seen to possess little sexual skill are thrown on the street, forced to solicit clients on dirty sidewalks and dark park passages. The most “beautiful” or sexually skilled women are installed in luxurious hotels where they service high-profile and wealthy clients.

Despite the level of prostitution, all the women are closely surveyed. Whether they are working in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris or along the glamorous Champs-Élysée, the pimps control the entirety of their activity. Besides street side solicitation, pimps advertise their African prostitutes on the Internet,

²³ Amély-James Koh Bela, *La prostitution africaine en Occident : Vérités-Mensonges-Esclaves* (France : Editions CCINIA Communication, 2005), 25.

subtly in newspapers, and through word of mouth by client. They organize meetings by telephone and through the Internet. Pimps are able to demand top dollar for women they sell to special “theme nights” involving situations of “lesbianism,” “sado-masochism,” “fist fucking,” and “bestiality.”²⁴ These evenings are often filmed and then sold as pornography at high prices to clients.

3. Pornography

African women are forced or end up in a pornography industry that specializes in the most horrific and degrading sex acts. Pimps sell their prostitutes to photographers and directors and sometimes use the films and pictures produced as advertisements that attract clients. African women are exhaustively exploited in “hard-core” pornography. They are filmed engaged in such practices as urolagnia, scatology, coprophagia, and bestiality. Being forced to taste and consume urine and feces is a traumatizing and endlessly degrading practice that affirms the inhumanity of these Black women in the eyes of the pimps, clients, and photographers. It is impossible to witness such forced acts and regard the subject as fully human. These practices are not rarities and are fueled by the demand of a delirious market. Authors and activists such as Amély-James Koh Bela have given a voice to many victims of such treacherous acts and have opened the veil to a more public audience who is quick to deny such atrocities as ever existing.

African women, at much higher rates than other groups, are victims of forced bestiality. Having intercourse and fellatio with animals is an extreme type of physical and mental abuse. Women sometimes receive anesthesia from medical professionals who are on set not necessarily to ease the pain of the prostitute but to make it so that these acts are even possible in the first place and to ensure that the entirety of the pain is not betrayed by the expressions of the women.²⁵ The demand for this type of pornography is high and sometimes the women make significant sums of money off of these films and photographs. Already prostituted, often forced into the pornography industry by their pimp, these acts further destroy their self-esteem and individual identity. But, as long as the demand is high, African women will continue to be exploited in this hellish market.

4. Deadly Consequences: Drug addiction and sexually transmitted diseases

The physical and mental effects of a life of prostitution, forced or otherwise, are numerous and incredibly dire. Some prostitutes neglect hygienic and health precautions and contract potentially fatal sexually transmitted diseases. This often occurs with young girls new to the market who are overwhelmed by the trade or who, desperate for money, decide to engage in sex acts without the use of a condom in order to make a bit more money. Drugs can be found at each tier of prostitution in France and there are traffickers who deal in both currencies. There is also a direct correlation between drug use and the spread of AIDS. Prostitutes risk contracting and spreading AIDS when they engage in activities with clients but also when they inject drugs. It’s a truly vicious circle as many prostitutes see drug use as the only means to endure their situation.

Many African prostitutes in France meet with ten to twenty (sometimes more) clients per day. In order to sustain this type of rhythm which is undoubtedly often physically and mentally abusive, many prostitutes rely on drugs and address their activity like machines, void of any vulnerability.²⁶ But it is impossible not to be vulnerable. These women suffer daily abuse and rely on drugs to endure their suffering at the most basic level. Drug use does not make them immune to abuse but they rely on drugs in the hopes of becoming as “numb” as possible.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 49.

²⁵ Grioo.com, « La réalité de la prostitution africaine en Europe », grioo.com, January 3rd 2005.

²⁶ Amély-James Koh Bela, *La prostitution africaine en Occident : Vérités-Mensonges-Esclaves* (France : Editions CCINIA Communication, 2005), 50.

Women and young girls who are trafficked from Africa are often forcibly addicted to drugs upon their arrival in France. Drugs permit pimps and criminal networks to ensure that their victims are dependent on them. They force women and young girls into submission with rape, physical abuse, and drug dependency. They also exploit their prostitutes as drug dealers in the areas where they are prostituted. These women, far from the “glamorous” hotels of African “escort girls” traverse incredibly dangerous areas and are often armed (weapons given to them by the pimps) in order to protect themselves and the drugs they carry on their person. Areas in Paris such as the neighborhoods surrounding the Gare du Nord and Porte de Clignancourt are known to be areas that harbor African prostitutes and drug dealers.

AIDS is commonly associated with African prostitutes who live in Africa. For instance in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal, 27.1% of the prostitutes there were HIV positive.²⁷ In France, the numbers of prostitutes who inject drugs and contract HIV is much lower. Although the statistics concerning AIDS among African prostitutes working in France are less alarming than those in Africa, the situation is still incredibly problematic and requires aggressive action. Pimps often abandon their prostitutes after learning that they’re HIV positive and these women, often completely drug dependant and with no real European work experience, are left completely vulnerable and in dire need of assistance.

5. Action by the State

In order to effectively fight against the sex trafficking and sexual slavery, disease and drug epidemics, and the physical and mental abuse suffered by prostitutes, a massive system of cooperation between nations, legislatures, and advocacy organizations is needed. The situation concerning African prostitutes in France requires the attention of both the French Government and the governments of the various African source nations. Immigration restrictions can be incredibly harmful to other population groups wishing to immigrate to France if not carefully handled. Individuals at every level are in need of information; from the African families who unknowingly send their daughters to be prostitutes in Europe to the immigration officials that pass trafficked women through train stations and airports daily.

The Government of France estimates that out of the 18,000 women in France’s commercial sex trade, the majority are likely forced into prostitution.²⁸ According to the Trafficking in Persons Report released by the U.S. State Department in June of 2010, the Government of France “fully complies with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.”²⁹ However, it is necessary that France increase the implementation of the nation’s anti-trafficking statute. It is also necessary that the French Government increase the protection it offers to unaccompanied minors in France who are potentially (often probably) the victims of sex trafficking.

A significant problem that plagues law enforcement policies in nations across the world is the frequent persecution of prostitutes without analogous consequences for clients or pimps. These women are victims and they suffer arrests in lieu of their pimps and their clients. It is essential that France work towards adjusting the approach of law enforcement officials so that they’re aware of the presence of pimps and traffickers when they encounter prostitutes in hotels and on the streets. Prostitutes should be able to rely on the State’s protection when they decide to disclose the identity of their traffickers to law enforcement officials.

Article 225 of the French penal code prohibits trafficking for sexual exploitation and prescribes penalties to offenders that mirror penalties given to those guilty of rape.³⁰ In 2009, the French Government successfully dismantled 40 trafficking rings in France and also cracked 14 international networks with the assistance of international partners. It is also important to note the collaboration

²⁷ World Health Organization, “HIV/AIDS sex work toolkit.” World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/vct/sw_toolkit/en/, 2004

²⁸ Department of State, United States of America, “Trafficking in Persons Report,” June 2010.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

between the Government of France and NGOs. This collaboration permits the government to help NGOs that provide direct aid to victims of sexual trafficking.

The French government provides witness protection services as well as residency permits to victims of trafficking who were cooperative in the investigation and prosecution of traffickers however permanent residency cards are only granted if the defendant accused of trafficking is successfully convicted by the government. This situation can easily become problematic for the victim if there is lasting evidence to convict her perpetrator. There have also been problems regarding police abuse and ineffective screening procedures, most notably the incidence reported in 2009 by a Human Rights Watch Report. The Report described a situation in which French authorities detained unaccompanied minors (potential trafficking victims among them), treated them as regular migrants, and deported them back to their home countries where they risked being re-trafficked.³¹

In terms of preventative efforts, the Government of France has made recent progress in their preventative methods and in January 2010 sponsored a conference that was attended by law enforcement officials, magistrates, and NGOs with the goal of improving cooperation between the parties in order to devise new effective methods for preventing trafficking.³² ECPAT France worked together with Air France to launch a public awareness campaign that, heavily influenced by the government, targeted French sex tourists. These types of efforts have the potential to be incredibly effective, especially when they involve the collaboration between the government and NGOs.

Although there are effective laws, preventative efforts, and collaborative projects in place, the problem of sexual trafficking especially as it applies to African women exploited in France requires attention from each tier of society. Thousands of women suffer in tortuous conditions of modern slavery and State power as well as local collaboration is needed to combat this horrendous phenomenon. Even though France has enacted comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, many of the African nations that are the main places of origin for African prostitutes in France have yet to comply with similar standards. For example, the Government of Cameroon made miniscule efforts in its anti-trafficking law enforcement practices in 2009 and has yet to pass and enact its 2006 draft law prohibiting all forms of trafficking in persons.³³

Conclusion

The situation concerning African prostitutes in France is complicated and involves various forms of coercion, abuse, and exploitation. Many women and children are tricked in their countries of origin and fully exploited upon their arrival in France. Some choose prostitution of their own volition, but even in these cases, the women have often come from desperate situations and feel they have no other choice but to prostitute themselves in order to survive. Women are robbed of their female identities, forced to become inhuman machines that service dozens of clients per day. Prostitutes in high-end markets, “escort girls,” and the occasional prostitutes “de luxe” also are robbed of their true feminine identities as they dress in costumes and become the fancy play things of business men and celebrities. Fancy, but still disposable.

It is impossible to discuss the situation concerning African prostitutes in France without realizing the deep-rooted legacy of racism that influences each level of the business from the socioeconomic conditions of the source nations to the clientele who demand to have their racist and perverted sexual fantasies fulfilled. The image of the strong, exotic, wild Black woman who is sexually promiscuous and mysteriously desirable is marketed to the clients that purchase their services in high-end nightclubs and hotels. These men seek fantasy. They seek the image, never the human. Clothed in expensive

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

ensembles and supplied with glamorous accessories, high-end African prostitutes fulfill the racist and deeply problematic fantasies that the Western world cannot assuage with the women it finds suitable for marriage. African brides are African slaves, filling the slave slot as their people have for centuries. African prostitution in France is as much a by-product of French colonialism as anything.

It is indeed, this legacy of colonialism and of slavery that permits the atrocities of bestiality, marital slavery, and pervasive drug addiction to occur across the French nation. Black women are viewed as objects, far less human than the wives, sisters, and daughters of the clients who purchase them. Trafficking in all persons, not just African individuals, is a crime against humanity and systematically works to enforce the concept that some within our world are dispensable and exist solely to funnel profits to others. The African prostitute, objectified and stripped of identity and humanity effectively fills the slot of the *Other*, the exploited, the enslaved, the *Less than*.

Few African women experience the romantic and adventurous France that is depicted in movies and advertisements throughout the world. They are from the Eden that is projected for them by the false promises of traffickers. These women imagine a glittering France of romance and opportunity and are met with a reality that resembles a hell more than an Eden. Even high-end prostitutes never fully achieve the Eden which they seek.

Prostitution in France is a business. It is a lucrative business. Pimps and trafficking rings exploit women from nations all over the world. France is home to a diverse population of prostitutes. African women who are prostituted in France fall victim to the legacy of racism that plagues the French nation even as it attempts to deal with contemporary issues of immigration not connected to trafficking and prostitution. Prostitution among African women in France varies. There are women who make significant sums independently, those who prostitute themselves occasionally, but also those who have been trafficked and are enslaved in deliriously hideous conditions. As the world attempts to meet this situation, a true effort of international collaboration and aggressive action is desperately necessary. Every nation must work incessantly towards more comprehensive solutions. The goal is transcendence.