

## Liberation from Juju in Sex Trafficking: What Strategies?

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to explore the elements that intervene during the process of liberation from the juju rite in women of African origin, trafficked for sexual purposes. There are several contributions in the literature that highlight the power of subjection to the juju ritual, but few have studied how the women who survived the trafficking succeed, once they arrive in the new continent, to free themselves from the power of juju. With the intent to fill this aspect of the literature, we will present the results of a research conducted with women who survived the sex trafficking, from Nigeria, subjected to the juju ritual before leaving for Italy. 24 life stories were conducted with the women participating in the research. The main results of the interviews show the centrality of the spiritual dimension also in the process of freeing: the latter passes through the re-appropriation and strengthening of Christian spiritual elements in opposition to juju.*

**Keywords:** Juju, sex trafficking, liberation, spirituality, religious syncretism

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this contribution is the exploration, through the narratives of Nigerian women who have emerged from sex trafficking, of the elements that favor emancipation from the forms of subjugation connected to the juju ritual. This is an important junction not only to deepen the transition from a condition of submission to the emergence of greater autonomy of life, but also to study the processes of cultural and religious change related to the migratory paths of the victims. In the scenario of sexual trafficking pertaining to African areas, in particular Nigerian, many are the women who arrive in European countries after having been subjected to the practice of juju connected to the religious tradition present in the same countries (Abbatecola, Benasso & Pidello, 2014). In recent years, anthropological and sociological literature has managed to problematize the issue by bringing to light the implications of the rite on the expression of individual freedom of women and on maintaining links with criminal networks related to trafficking (Ferrari, 2021; Dunkerley, 2018; Ikeoara, 2016). What, however, still remains poorly studied is the mechanism that leads victims to free themselves from juju, especially in cases where there is an interruption of the pact of obedience between the woman and the exploiter before the repayment of the debt contracted for the trip (Van Der Watt & Kruger, 2017). The reasons for a marginal attention on this issue are most likely two: the first concerns the general lack of attention by the scientific literature on the phase of exiting from sex trafficking (Hammond, Clark & McGlone, 2014), the second concerns the media sensationalism connected to aspects of ritual violence that are reported in the popular literature or in the testimonies offered by former victims which also seem to be affected by the scientific debate (Countryman-Roswurm & Patton Bracking, 2017); the risk in this case is to slip into the construction of an esoteric, macabre tale that cages and limits the development of alternative reflections around the theme.

Entering this scenario, therefore, we want to focus on breaking the subjugation connected to juju: what are the elements that come into play? How do you get out of a “field” characterized by precise cultural and religious semantics, into which one enters through a choral ritual marked by particular symbolic violence? (Bourdieu, 2010). These are the questions that have guided the research process, which we will present later, conducted with Nigerian women who left the sexual trafficking circuit before paying off their debt. In fact, we move within a particularly significant survey scenario, but at the same time complex precisely because it moves on the intersection of two fractures. The first is defined by the struggle for the recovery of one’s independence which becomes particularly considerable within the exploitative-exploited dynamic typical of sexual trafficking, culminating in the rite of juju (Abbatecola, 2018; Bales, 2004). The second concerns the cultural-religious dimension in which the animist component of the African tradition is confronted in a new multicultural context, but western of the European countries of arrival which are mainly of Catholic Christian matrix as in the case of Italy.

In summary, after framing the concepts of “juju” and “oath” in use in West Africa and showing how they act in the sexual trafficking of Nigerian women, in the second part of the contribution we will present the results of the research carried out with a group of people out of sex trafficking, highlighting the mechanisms that lead them to free themselves from the subjugation connected to juju.

## **2. The practice of juju and oaths: between traditional cults and religious syncretism**

Among the traditional religions of West Africa, the woodoo or voodoo, commonly translated as juju<sup>1</sup>, is a form of religion particularly widespread in the territorial area of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin (Cocconcelli, 2014). Taking on different shapes and characteristics depending on the local cultures and traditions in which it is located, the woodoo recognizes the presence of a supreme god creator<sup>2</sup> of the universe and father of all gods. The space between this and men is not without presences, but on the contrary it is animated by different divinities (loa or orisha) who must be worshiped: they are good or bad and are all hierarchically differentiated (Hurbon, 1972, 1993). The only way to get closer to divinity is to use “mediators”: priests in charge of invoking the loa that manifest themselves through the possession of a human being (Fiorelli, 2000). To facilitate this possession, the people of the community perform rituals related to sacrifices, frantic dances ballad to tribal rhythms that accompany the priests towards the acquisition of a state of trance or ecstasy in which divinity is manifested (Deren, 2018). Woodoo is not a religion aimed at the salvation of souls, but rather, through the intervention of the loa, seeks to facilitate the pragmatic solution of everyday problems. While it is true that the deities offer concrete help to people, on the other hand they bind them to respect certain commitments; this in order to maintain and preserve a moral cohesion within the community affiliated to the woodoo. The dimension of commitment, precisely, is made tangible through the implementation of an oath, a practice that has become acceptable not only in the religious sphere, but also legitimized and also used for the resolution of disputes related to the country’s legal code (Oraegbunam, 2009). The consequence has been the strong mix of religious and/or cultural aspects with socio-normative ones in the different communities (Onunwa, 2010) also in the use of oaths, the exercise of which is mediated by the use of fetishes (Oviasuyi, Ajagun & Isiraoje, 2011). The parties called into question submit to the supernatural tribunal whose verdict is definitive: in the event that the jurors are in default, the deities have the faculty to strike them to punish them. It is therefore evident how juju and the practice of oath, due to its fetishist nature, are strongly intertwined: in many cases oath-taking is in fact carried out in front of the Juju shrines and it is precisely the priest or priestess who preside over its performance (Ikeora, 2016).

Despite the development and spread of the Christian religion in Africa, also due in part to the processes of colonization and evangelization, the oath-juju has remained deeply rooted in traditional African belief systems as well as in the legal system of some African countries, so much so that scholars even speak of “institutionalized superstition” in Nigeria (Agazue, 2013, p. 42). The social complexity and religious syncretism that characterizes the regions of Africa we are dealing with is also reflected in the spread of Christian and Muslim communities that secretly practice the local religious tradition equally (Akosah-Sarpong, 2007): for example, many Christians - even Catholics - follow voodoo and many followers of the woodoo adhere to the dictates of Christianity. This is a syncretism which, however, is not without contradictions: often the practices of traditional religions are used for the protection against evil spirits, the improvement of the climatic condition or the state of health of the population even if the rituals related to the traditional cult come into conflict with those promoted by the teaching of other religions present in the area, such as the Christian one (Alpes, 2008; Mveng & Pistocchi, 1990; Bernardi, 2001). The result was therefore that of the proliferation of a syncretism, not always peacefully accepted by all religious communities. (Trombetta, 2004; Ries & Sullivan, 2009). The cultural and cultural ambivalence and coexistence inherent in different religions undoubtedly constitutes historical and biographical baggage not only for the locals, but also for those migrating to new countries.

## **3. Juju as a Subjugation Strategy in Sex Trafficking**

Since the beginning of the new century, efforts in the international and national fields to study forced prostitution related to human trafficking have intensified and have made it possible to grasp more precisely the aspects characterizing the phenomenon. Among the various prostitutional models linked to trafficking and identified by sector studies (Baldoni, 2007; Carchedi, 2004; Abbatecola, 2018), the Nigerian one still remains one of the most widespread in Europe and Italy (Walker, Gavia & Gopal, 2019; Greta, 2019). The scholars who have dealt with analyzing the model have often highlighted the characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of sex trafficking. In fact, the Nigerian one provides for less violent and aggressive recruitment methods than those of other countries, based, however, mainly on a sort of oral contract (sometimes also written) sealed by the magical-religious ritual that we have in the previous paragraph, precisely, described as oath-juju (Kara, 2009).

<sup>1</sup>In this paper we use the terms juju, voodoo and hoodoo interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Among the Ewe of Togo, it takes the name of Mawu, while among the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin it is named Olorun.

With it the girl undertakes to pay off the debts contracted with her traffickers for the realization of the migratory journey. In this scenario, the family often plays the role of guarantor with respect to the repayment of the money: the extinction of the debt involves breaking the bond of submission of the girl to her exploiters (often women called *maman*). The penalty for those who choose to break the oath is death, of their own or of their respective family members, or illness (including mental) or physical injury and damage. Several studies have, in fact, highlighted how traditional swearing rituals such as *juju* are used as “control mechanisms” to keep the woman in a state of slavery or subjugation of traffickers. (Gbadamosi, 2006). In some empirical contributions it has emerged that this particular ceremony tends to be applied when the trafficker considers the woman as a sure source of income (Ikeora, 2016). The practice of *juju*, presided over by the native doctor, a predominantly male priestly figure, in many cases involves the use of women’s clothing (often intimate garments), their blood or that of animals present at the ritual, pubic hair, hair or nails. During the ritual, it is not unusual for the victims to ingest drinks containing some of these elements or for the traffickers to keep goods stolen from people as a sign of “possession” so that, despite the physical distance, a connection between the victim is always preserved and trafficker (Ikeora, 2014; Familusi, 2012). The reference to the practices of *juju* today is far from that preserved in the sanctuaries of Benin<sup>3</sup>: transformed into a baroque ritual, almost perverse, its function is no longer that of communication with the divinities of the voodoo pantheon, but that of a ritualized submission impregnated with locally effective symbols (Brivio, 2012; Beneduce, 2005). The ritual, which enters fully into the clandestine migration story, therefore sees not so much the celebration of a divinity who offers help and protection, but on the contrary becomes an exercise of dark power over bodies and minds: the symbolic is removed from its functions of “union” and “integration” to be used in the service of exploitation and domination in which little power of action is released to women. Clearly the practices of subjugation are not typical of African cultural rituals, but are transversally present in all institutions, in particular religious ones (Beneduce, 2009). The ritualization offers a character of “permanence” to the symbolic act which in the case of women victims of trafficking is subordination.

This is an important junction that sees the obligatory construction of an accession pact (Abbatecola, 2018), which manipulates any form of individual agency (Van Der Matt Kruger, 2020). The criticality of the rite, therefore, lies not so much in the celebration of *juju*, as in the perversion of the symbolic meanings it is imbued with. “*The wicked pacts that evoke voodoo are therefore the dark folds of a religious who subjugates and dominates, making use of symbols with a long and controversial history (sacrifice, blood, "baptism", the macabre meal)*” (Beneduce, 2009, p. 39). The perversion we are witnessing has nothing to do with a regressive movement of social life in present-day Africa, but on the contrary it refers to the violence that questions the religious and the symbolic. As Mbembe (1992; 1990) recalls, the same exploitation and drift of the sacred that is found in *juju* can be easily traced in the historical events of Christian conversion in Africa in which the war on local symbolisms (Gruzinski, 1991) has turned into an occasion for domination and subjection. If the symbolic violence of the *juju* rite is the cultural precipitate with which women victims of sex trafficking begin the transition to a new country, it is necessary to investigate the processes and ways in which they manage to free themselves from the oath, especially in cases where they break their links with the exploiters before the settlement of the debt (necessary condition for termination without consequences of the oath). How is the traditional cultural-religious dimension elaborated above all within a Western, multicultural, tendentially secularized context, but still strongly characterized by the Catholic-Christian matrix? (Inglehart, Basanez, Diez-Medrano, Halman, & Luijkx, 2000; Halman, Sieben, & van Zundert, 2011). How do these elements come into play during the emancipation process from sexual trafficking in which the rite of *juju* is a junction that strongly influences the decision to escape the mechanisms of exploitation? With the desire to better investigate these questions, we will present an empirical research path dedicated to exploring these aspects.

#### 4. The Research

The research path we wish to present in this paper is part of a broader context of empirical survey intended to investigate the social processes that lead women who have come out of trafficking for sexual purposes to become anti-trafficking operators. Within this scenario, we wanted to devote a significant part of the work to the study of the following research question: what are the mechanisms of emancipation from the threats related to the practice of *juju* of trafficked women?

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<sup>3</sup>Region of Nigeria.

#### 4.1 The subjects of the research

Research participants (n = 24)<sup>4</sup> are aged between 20 and 40<sup>5</sup>, all from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in particular from Edo State or Delta State - both states recognized as endangered areas for the trade in beings' humans for sexual purposes (Farrell, & de Vries, 2020). The women were subjected to the juju rite before their departure to Europe and have been out of trafficking for at least five years: this criterion was chosen in order to avoid any re-traumatization related to the story of past life episodes (Cecchet & Thoburn, 2014) and at the same time collect narratives that are not excessively influenced by the style of exposure very often requested in Territorial Commissions<sup>6</sup> or in institutionalized settings (Gallerani & Belluto, 2019). In these circumstances, in fact, there is a risk of the schematic and "standardized" repetition of life stories that leave little room for narrative divergence and meta-reflection by women. In all cases they were women currently professing and practicing the Christian religion (Catholic or Evangelist). In some cases, the conversion to the Catholic Christian religion took place following the arrival in Italy, once the prostitutional practice was abandoned, after or during the reception period at anti-trafficking institutions. In this regard, all the women in the sample were included in the special protection program dedicated to victims of trafficking (Article 18 of the Immigration Consolidation Act, adopted with Legislative Decree 286/98) deciding to file a complaint against their exploiters. The inclusion in the reception and special protection path took place before the exhaustion of the initial debt contracted by the women for the journey to Europe. This element is not an irrelevant detail as it implies the value of the agreement between the exploiter and the exploited, sealed with juju during the "escape" from criminal networks. In other words, at the time of entry to the reception facilities the threat of the oath was still valid for the women of the sample. This element was in fact used as a further discriminating criterion for the choice of people to be included in the research. As regards the marital status of the selected persons, these are women married with a Christian marriage or celibate, but having romantic relationships.

Finally, for the constitution of the sample, it was decided to include as participants in the research people residing in regions of northern Italy (Piedmont and Lombardy; n = 12) and southern Italy (Sicily; n = 12) as they are particularly exposed to the phenomenon of Nigerian sex trafficking (Greta, 2019).

The recruitment of participants was made possible through contacting the bodies of the Italian anti-trafficking network, the list of which is freely available within the national observatory<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.2 Data collection tool

For the realization of the research, it was decided to resort to life stories (Bichi, 2002): they, in fact, allow the reconstruction of biographical trajectories, highlighting "*the mechanisms and processes through which the subjects found themselves in a given situation and how they try to manage it*" (Bertaux, 1998, p. 38). In particular, the interview outline included 4 sections: the first dedicated to exploring life in one's own context of origin; the second area dedicated to deepen recruitment in sex trafficking, travel and the period of exploitation; the third section investigated the exit from prostitution and entry into reception facilities; the fourth is the recovery of one's autonomy of life and therefore the removal from the protection systems. The interviews were conducted individually by the researcher according to a non-directive approach: each of them lasted about 90 minutes and was carried out in the home of the same woman, also using online platforms (Skype, Meet) following the expansion of the covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken by the authorities regarding travel. At the end of the interview, the researcher proceeded with the full transcript of the interview; the material was subsequently subjected to the analysis of the hermeneutic type content through the computer support of N-Vivo 12 (Cipriani, 2008; Mortari, 2013): specifically, we proceeded through the definition of content categories that do not pre-exist the text, but emerged from the verbalizations issued by women, according to a grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). In order to ensure the transparency of each step of the research, but also with the intention of remaining as close as possible to the narration of the participants, it was decided, first of all, to return to each woman the transcript of her anonymized interview and, secondly, once a first analysis has been carried out on the collected material, deliver the results to the research participants.

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<sup>4</sup> The number is functional to the achievement of the saturation of the codes and meanings in the analysis (Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Mean age of 33 with a standard deviation of 9.

<sup>6</sup> The Territorial Commission in Italy is the place where migrants who apply for asylum are heard and then eventually issue them with documents.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.osservatoriointerventitratita.it>.

## 5. The Results: processes and mechanisms of emancipation from the Juju oath in the tale of women

The interviews conducted with women who have come out of sex trafficking highlight the different aspects through which they managed to free themselves from the subjugation mechanisms connected to juju. We therefore wish to report the main results that emerged from the research by reporting the most significant verbatim in reference to two aspects: first of all, the experience of the rite in order to understand how it was articulated, with which figures it happened and above all what is the meaning attributed by women. Secondly, we will present the results related to the release methods with the aim of identifying the elements that facilitate the breaking of the juju subjection.

### • *The experience of juju: meanings and signifiers*

In line with the literature that has deepened the practice of the juju rite and the strong symbolic value exerted on the victims, even in the case of our sample we can find all the elements previously described present in the ritual:

*“\*\*\* took us to a place. I remember that the native doctor made me eat a fruit, Kolanut, took my hair, armpit and pubic hair. He scarified my hands, feet and forehead and then put a substance on my wounds [...] Afterwards he made us repeat a phrase like: "if we do anything to rebel, juju will kill us and if we change our minds and don't continue the trip the juju will kill us and if we say that she is the one who sent us abroad we will be dead and if we refuse to pay the debts we will be dead" [...] Later he told me that he would keep those parts of my body only as insurance” [4\_f\_don\_n].*

As emerges from the words of the woman during the oath made in the presence of the divinity, her freedom is offered as a pledge to the exploiter who will become the guarantor of the woman's journey. The oath has the function of ensuring the economic return of an investment advanced by the exploiters / traffickers to pay for the victims' travel. In this case, the regulatory aspect of the oath assumes these configurations. The rite of juju, at the same time, enrolls the woman in another phase of life, marking the transition not only to another country, but another status: from free to “submissive”, “committed” to a promise.

### • *The release from juju*

Dwelling on the period following the arrival of women in Italy, the interviewees recounted the effort to escape from the subjugation caused by juju and the consequent intimidation of their tormentors. From the words of the participants, it emerges that at this point in the migration story, a central role is played not so much by beliefs in voodoo, but by the emergence of another cultural reference present in one's own cultural scope offered by Christian beliefs:

*“So I think, I know I have power inside of me! That there is, that no one can see like this... the power of God, of Jesus Christ! I use this to eliminate the power of juju. The power of juju is the power of a spiritual thing, even traditional, that is used to scare the victims so as not to declare, not to report their exploiters... so [...] you must have another power that is against. The only one is the power of Jesus Christ ... why am I not afraid? For this” [8\_f\_don\_n.];*

*“Jesus freed the woman they wanted to kill ... let anyone who has no sin cast the first stone. Faith helps you because if one comes from a believing family ... one understands that everything we said before leaving is unsuccessful” [20\_f\_don\_s].*

It is therefore through the reference to another religious profession that women are able to overcome the fears and difficulties associated with the rite and the oath taken: it is as if the other dimension of religious syncretism in which they grew up was recovered, that is the inherent oneto the Christian belief. It is interesting that this dimension only emerges in the new country which, not surprisingly, is strongly characterized by the Christian spiritual dimension.

In other cases, the importance of a Christian cultic heritage transmitted intergenerationally by one's parents and recognized as a personal asset of value for overcoming the submission connected to the juju rite is recognized:

*“I think it takes a good will to escape ... in my case it helped me that my parents are Christians [...] and therefore it was easier for me ... I always say this when someone says to me: "why the others they don't run away "? ... eh ... why don't the others run away? Because when you have two parents who are Christians and who all your life has taught you that you must behave like a Catholic, if someone comes and tells you that "if you don't do this, you can die!" ... then it's easier not to have that conviction of the ritual” [10\_f\_don\_n].*

Furthermore, from the interviewees' words it emerges that the recovery of a spirituality connected to Christianity is not only a practice that is personally experienced in the here and now, but it is used by the women themselves as a specific strategy to support other compatriots leaving the country. trafficking related exploitation:

*“So we use the Bible to study and teach other people ... and then we use the power of Jesus Christ and the church to compare the power of juju with the power of Jesus ... so all the girls who go to church ... listen to this and then take away fear. You must not be afraid, because if you have Jesus Christ, it is he who gave his life on the cross for us to live and then no one can harm us if Jesus is with us! So the power of juju, the oath of juju for us does not exist, because we have the one who out of love left his life on the cross for us ... and then if you also say: “you did juju if you got into debt and you leave, you can die “I say:” as a witness ... I have not died for 20 years!” [18\_f\_don\_n].*

Once removed from the trafficking and started a personal life project alternative to exploitation, in fact, the interviewees tell how the personal experience lived is often capitalized and used to offer proof of the “validity” of the strategies that they themselves have used to free themselves from juju:

*“I came as you came! ”... I say it! Because to give reasons if one is afraid ... [...] to show others ... if they are afraid ... fear does nothing! Juju who has done ... it doesn't matter! ... because to get here they took off my nails, my hair ... but not ... I'm here! I got bigger, stronger... then: that doesn't work! But if you want to become like me one day, then get it all out of your head! ... [...] my faith has helped me a lot” [14\_f\_don\_n].*

In some narratives, even with respect to the religious practices perpetuated in the countries of destination once they have left forced prostitution, we find that life in the new continent is marked by total adherence to the current Catholic religion sealed with a new baptism: *“here in Italy I converted to a Catholic Church ... because I did not want to go here to the Nigerians ... I did not want to involve in some problem ... because there are so many things ... [...] being that I am a mediator, I have to give an example ... I cannot be a 'friend of ... I don't want a problem ...” [12\_f\_don\_s].*

## **6. Some considerations**

The intent of this contribution was to initiate a reflection on the strategies and processes that favor the emancipation from subjugation connected to the juju rite, experienced by women victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The research path that we presented facilitated the study of the topic starting from their testimonies. The first consideration we feel we need to make refers to the complexity of the meaning that the juju rite has for women: if the oath is what usually regulates the mutual commitments within the community of origin, the breaking of this pact not only implies the superior intervention of the divinity, but, in other words, is equivalent to breaking the alliance towards the systems regulations of your company (Onunwa, 2010). In other words, withdrawing from the commitment taken with the exploiters is not a question that is resolved within the dyadic relationship between women and traffickers, but defines the belonging of the parties to the same community: failure to take the oath would therefore mean undermining affiliation with the company to which one is part, with the risk of losing important references for one's social identity. This is a particularly significant aspect, especially within a migratory path, such as that experienced by trafficked women, which even more urges people to have to review how to renegotiate their belonging of origin in the light of the new reception context. So how to avoid the total dispersion of identity and of one's traits (Berry, 2006)? The results of the interviews show how, most likely, the fragmentation of the self also occurs thanks to the recovery of an additional cultural baggage already possessed: or that associated with the Christian faith, however present also in the host country. In this sense, the question of dual religious belonging would seem to emerge (Turaki, 2019). The possible overcoming of juju is due, as reported by the participants of the research, primarily to a reappropriation of Christian spirituality in a foreign land: some of these trafficked women would, therefore, recognize the part of their faith in Christ as a shield of protection from the fear of the oath they took (Alpes, 2008). It is, in fact, a cultic dimension not completely foreign to the historical and cultural tradition of women (sometimes present within the same intergenerational dynamics), but which on the contrary refers to the syncretism between the cult of voodoo and pre-existing Christianity. to migration and connected to the historical events that have crossed the regions of Africa from which the women of the sample and most of the victims destined for sex trafficking come (Bernardi, 2001). The grammars of both religions are already present in the cultural reach of women and therefore it is easier to try to emancipate oneself from something that is feared by using “cultural tools” already acquired and internalized as one's own (Aghatise, 2011).

In addition, it should be emphasized that the "re-appropriation" of Christian cultural elements takes place only once they arrive in the new country and above all with the liberation from criminal networks related to trafficking. The conversion marked, in some cases by a new ritual, such as that of baptism, would seem in many ways to mark not only the end of the “journey” that these women have undertaken (physical journey - from Africa to a new continent - and indicating a parenthesis of suspension from one's life characterized by the experience of trafficking), but also initiation and insertion into a new society. We know, in fact, how much rituals (Mead, 1928; Victor, 1972) inscribe those who pass through them in new belongings, in new social and cultural registers.

The possibility of recovering a spirituality and a social belonging connected to the Christian community could therefore be a strategy of acculturation in the new host society (Abbatecola, 2011; Cabras, 2015; Nazzaro, 2010) that would protect from the total loss of cultural-religious references, invoking a divine power known and at the same time accepted within the new host country.

## 7. Conclusions

The goal of our work was to try to identify some mechanisms through which women victims of trafficking manage to escape the rite of juju once they arrive in the new country: it is in fact a little explored topic in literature. Although there are many national and international contributions that have grasped the dimension of subjugation connected to juju, the reflections that try to understand how and through which elements women are able to free themselves from fear and submission to the oath are practically absent.

We have recognized the centrality of spirituality in people from African countries such as Nigeria, Benin and Ghana where the religion of voodoo was born and spread (Taliani, 2011) highlighting, thanks to the voice of the women protagonist's research, how the recovery of a culturally and familiarly possessed system of cultic beliefs can help women to escape the constraint of the oath connected to juju. In this regard, we hypothesized, in the final considerations, how this process can also facilitate the acculturation process of migrant women in the new country: this is an aspect that should certainly be explored in further research work. In general, however, we believe that this contribution may not offer valid reflections and operational insights even for those who are involved in the field of socio-health aid professions in the field of anti-trafficking, underlining the importance of the cult dimension for the trials of integration and emancipation from trafficking and attributing a new meaning to juju-oaths, often devalued for their fetishistic origin (Beneduce & Taliani, 2012; Beneduce & Roudinesco, 2005).

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