

Physical and Legal Geographies of the Trade of Nigerian Women in Italy: Views and Stories from C.I.E.s

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The aim of this work is to report the experience of the *Befree Social Cooperative against trade, violence and discrimination* within the women's department of the Governmental Centre of Identification and Deportation of Rome-Ponte Galeria (Italy) a centre where immigrants who are to be considered "illegal" according to the current regulations are detained.

The opening of these Centres was laid down by the Immigration Act (decree 286/1998) which also established (article 18) the possibility for the victims of the trade of human beings to be granted a special residence permit.

Currently, in line with the restrictive European immigration policies, the possibilities of entrance into and residence within the Italian territory have been dramatically reduced with the introduction of the crime of illegal immigration and the tightening of the system of deportation of migrants. Such a different political and legislative frame, together with a change in the social attitude, has caused a dangerous lowering of the threshold level of the guarantee and defence of migrants' human rights. Through the stories of the women we have met in our psycho-social and legal counselling activity at the C.I.E., we have been able to gain an insight into the vicissitudes which affect the migration of many African, especially Nigerian, women, who reach Italy. These journeys are marked by the same stages and characterised by serious violations of human rights. Their life stories reveal the existence of a permanent transnational criminal organization handling the trade of human beings, and they highlight how Nigerian women are forced into prostitution in illegal brothels while passing through Libya. This system is marked by the capitalisation and exploitation of the bodies of migrant women, who are therefore victims of a multiple discrimination: their being women, trafficked, sexually exploited in Libya, detained in the C.I.E.s and deprived, in Italy, of all social protection; indeed, they are not entitled to a residence permit as stated by art.18, since this is provided just for those women who are exploited within the Italian territory, and it is therefore denied to the women who are exploited only in Libya. This explains the need to raise a debate about the lack of regulations in a country like Italy which is at the centre of the migratory flux.