

REVIEW ARTICLE

Migration, Human Trafficking and the Illusion of the European Dream in Kenneth Gyang's *Òlòtūré*

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ABSTRACT

Migration remains a substantial socio-economic phenomenon, often driven by the desire for better economic opportunities, security, and living conditions. However, the growing urgency to achieve a better life has resulted in the exposure of a significant number of migrants, particularly young African women, to transnational violence and human trafficking networks that are exploitative. Although existing research has primarily focused on the socio-economic, legal, and policy aspects of migration and trafficking, there has been a dearth of scholarly attention to the psychological manipulation, false promises and ideological constructions that perpetuate irregular migration in Nigerian films. This study addresses this gap by examining the intersection of migration, human trafficking, and the deceptive allure of the European ideal in Kenneth Gyang's *Òlòtūré* (2019). The study aims to interrogate how the film depicts the realities of trafficking, the exploitation of vulnerable migrants and the collapse of projected European wealth when confronted with abuse and survival. While Postcolonial Theory provides a framework for examining colonial legacies, global disparities and the persistent marginalization of formerly colonized states, Spivak's perspective foregrounds the gendered dimensions of vulnerability, silencing, and restricted agency faced by women amid intersecting systems of patriarchy, economic hardship, and exploitation. Findings reveal that *Òlòtūré* presents the European ideal as a deceptive illusion fueled by economic deprivation, despair and misinformation. Traffickers use false narrative structure of wealth and freedom to exploit migrants' hopes. The film also demonstrates that human trafficking is more than just an individual tragedy, but the result of larger socioeconomic inequities and structural failures. The study indicates that Nigerian cinema is an important medium for debating migratory realities and pushing for awareness, social reform, and the protection of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: *Migration, Human Trafficking, European Dream, Nollywood*

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Introduction

Migration has remained a significant socioeconomic and cultural phenomenon, shaping human experiences across borders. Historically, migration has been associated with the desire for security, economic advancement, social mobility and better living circumstances. In Africa, however, migration has become linked to stories of desperation, inequality, unemployment and the aspiration for a brighter future beyond national borders (Czaika & Weisner, 2025). Many young Africans, in particular, see Europe as a place of prosperity, dignity and opportunity, resulting in what has been dubbed the "European Dream," a powerful social imagination that depicts Europe as a promised country where economic hardships can be overcome. Yet, this aspiration often obscures the realities of irregular migration, exploitation and human trafficking, highlighting the disparity between migrants' hopes and their lived experiences (Vanderhurst, 2022).

The increasing irregular migration of Nigerians, particularly young women, to Europe has sparked widespread intellectual and humanitarian concern. Traffickers frequently exploit economic distress and migratory desires by making false promises of better chances overseas. As a result, pursuing the European Dream frequently results in deception, forced labour, sexual exploitation, violence and psychological trauma, exposing migrants to modern forms of oppression and enslavement rather than the riches they want (Bogatzki & Meierrieks, 2026; Effevottu, 2020; Yakubu et al., 2019). Within this context, Nigerian cinema has emerged as an essential medium for depicting migratory realities and exploring the societal conditions that render migrants vulnerable. Beyond entertainment, Nollywood serves as a platform for social criticism, revealing economic disparities, political failures, gendered vulnerabilities, and human rights violations (Akin, 2009). According to Jedlowski (2018), “films about migration and human trafficking promote public discourse by emphasizing the complicated connections between economic deprivation, aspiration, deceit and exploitation” (p.161). Kenneth Gyang’s *Òlòtūré* highlights the hazardous nexus between migration goals, human trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable Nigerian women. The film tells the narrative of *Òlòtūré*, an undercover journalist who infiltrates a trafficking syndicate. It explores how the promise of wealth in Europe is used to exploit women. It undermines the idealized picture of migration by exposing the harsh realities and illusions of the European Dream.

Existing studies have primarily examined human trafficking and migration from a sociological, legal, and humanitarian standpoint, with a focus on issues such as socioeconomic drivers of migration, migrant vulnerability, trafficking networks, policy interventions, victim protection and human rights concerns. Carling (2006), for example, investigates irregular migration, human smuggling and trafficking from Nigeria to Europe, focusing on migratory reasons, economic conditions and the mechanisms that allow migrants to be exploited. Similarly, Aghatise (2002) examines Nigerian women’s trafficking experiences via human rights and legal lens, emphasizing exploitation, prostitution and the necessity for protective measures. Aronowitz (2009) and O’Connell (2010) investigate trafficking from legal, criminal and victimization viewpoints. However, little attention has been paid to how Nigerian films establish the ideological meaning of the European Dream through cinematic language, dialogue, and visual depiction. Nollywood’s portrayal of trafficking has been noticed, but there is limited research on how *Òlòtūré* interrogates migrant illusions, exposes contradictions of supposed European wealth and shows trafficking as a result of societal imbalances and failed hopes. Hence, this paper pays attention to the persistent gap between the public conception of Europe as a source of economic salvation and the brutal realities of exploitation suffered by many illegal migrants. While migration tales frequently focus on human desires, there has been little attention paid to how films depict the institutional disparities and deceitful procedures that turn migration dreams into trafficking experiences. This leaves a gap in film studies concerning how Nigerian cinema constructs the illusion of the European Dream and analyzes the sociopolitical structures that perpetuate it. This study examines how Kenneth Gyang’s *Òlòtūré* portrays migration, human trafficking and fraudulent promises linked with Europe through narrative strategies, thematic issues, and cinematic representations.

Literature Review

The European Dream, Irregular Migration and Human Exploitation: An Overview

The European Dream depicts an idealized view of Europe as a source of prosperity, security, freedom, and socioeconomic growth. Similar to the American Dream, it is based on the assumption that migrating to Europe provides chances for higher living conditions, jobs, education and dignity. However, research shows a conflict between this goal and the realities of irregular migration, such as exploitation, human trafficking, forced labour and social isolation (Bish et al., 2024). Purkayastha et al. (2023) contend that the European Dream is both a compelling goal and an ideological construct that often conceals inequalities and vulnerabilities within global migration systems.

Migration has historically been a significant pathway for people seeking better economic and social opportunities; however, economic deprivation, unemployment, insecurity, political instability, unequal global relations and restrictive immigration policies have fueled the desire to migrate to Europe. Sanchez & Achilli (2019) observe that the apparent disparity between migrants’ experiences and

Europe's prosperity fosters powerful imaginaries that promote irregular migration. Many people, influenced by social media and migrant networks, see Europe as a symbol of hope and transformation, but they ignore the obstacles of exploitation, limited rights, and social marginalization that irregular migrants experience.

Sanchez & Achilli (2019) assert that irregular migration refers to the transboundary movement or habitation of individuals who do not adhere to prescribed immigration protocols, including unauthorized entry, visa violations, or illegal employment. Nonetheless, irregular migration is not merely an individual decision, since it is frequently influenced by intricate socioeconomic and political circumstances. In the Nigerian context, Fanu et al. (2023) identify poverty, substandard living conditions, insecurity, economic inequality, inadequate leadership, and limited educational prospects as contributors to irregular migration. In a similar vein, Albert-Makyur and Mbanaso (2022) associate irregular migration in Nigeria with unemployment, poverty, insecurity, inadequate governance, corruption, and inefficient migration strategies.

The criminalization of irregular migration has heightened the susceptibility of migrants by forcing them into clandestine networks dominated by traffickers and exploitative intermediaries. Research on the facilitation of irregular migration indicates that migrants frequently depend on unofficial migration agents when legitimate pathways to Europe are inaccessible or significantly restricted. This reliance can subject migrants to fraud, economic exploitation, maltreatment, and hazardous travel, as traffickers may distort the safety, logistics, and length of migration pathways (Obikaeze & Iloh, 2023). van Liempt (2011) supports this by stating:

Thus, the generalization that all migrant women, especially from Africa or other designated hotspots are at risk of being trafficked could lead to policy measures that may serve to restrict women's choices even further. Not all women striving to reach European soil through irregular means consider themselves as victims of trafficking but as a daring attempt to escape economic privation. They are driven to sex trafficking networks the same way young men seek to access European territory via smuggling networks in Libya and the deadly Mediterranean voyage (p.179).

Cockbain et al., (2018) further affirmed that migrants constitute a susceptible demographic since their lack of legal status, low understanding of their rights and economic desperation expose them to exploitative labour arrangements. While irregular migration and human trafficking often overlap, they are separate occurrences. Irregular migration denotes movement that transpires beyond the established legal or regulatory structures pertaining to entry, residency, or employment, while human trafficking encompasses the recruitment, transportation, sheltering, or acquisition of individuals through coercion, deceit, fraud, or the exploitation of vulnerabilities for exploitative purposes (Erimwinorosee, 2026). However, restricted migration policies might increase migrants' reliance on criminal networks, leaving them vulnerable to debt exploitation, deceit and trafficking. According to Salt (2000), restrictive migration regimes may unintentionally enhance migrants' dependence on criminal networks by limiting access to safe and legal movement channels.

Human exploitation in the context of European migration illustrates wider disparities present in European labour markets. Numerous migrants are clustered in low-paying and unstable jobs, where their susceptibility to exploitation is exacerbated by social and legal elements, such as uncertain migratory status, restricted labour rights, and social exclusion (Palumbo et al., 2022). According to Cockbain & Dimitrova (2018), the pursuit of the European Dream typically leads to disappointment as migrants face exploitation rather than success, with little access to safety and justice. Furthermore, media and popular cultural representations influence attitudes of the European Dream. While images of Europe as a land of opportunity can raise excessive expectations, descriptions of migrants as threats frequently ignore the structural factors that drive migration. Rossoni & De Massol (2025) highlight the need of viewing migrants as autonomous persons negotiating uneven global systems. The experiences of illegal migrants highlight the tensions of global mobility, in which economic flows move freely while human movement is limited.

Grundler (2024) advocates for a rethinking of migration governance that addresses the core causes of irregular migration while also extending safe, legal, and accessible migration channels. Rather of relying primarily on border control and criminalisation, long-term solutions should address economic deprivation, employment, human security, migrant protection and international cooperation. Effective migration policy must prioritise vulnerability reduction, as restrictive measures may expose migrants to exploitation. As a result, the European Dream, irregular migration, and human exploitation are all interconnected phenomena formed by global inequities, restrictive migration policies and migrants' hopes for a better future. Although Europe promises opportunity for many, migrants' pursuit of this goal frequently leads to exploitation, dependency and suffering. This contradiction provides a fundamental framework for examining cinematic portrayals of migration that highlight the disparity between anticipated wealth and migrants' daily realities.

Theoretical Framework

Kenneth Gyang's *Òlòtùré* explores migration, human trafficking and the European Dream through the lens of Postcolonial Theory, complemented by a gender-sensitive perspective informed by Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern woman. Postcolonial Theory, associated with scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, investigates how colonial histories and their enduring political, economic and cultural structures continue to shape relations between the Global North and Global South. Postcolonial scholars assert that migration is shaped by colonial legacies, global inequalities, racial stratifications, and capitalist oppression. This imbalanced dynamic fosters the perception of Europe as an emblem of affluence, liberty, and potential, whereas African communities are often relegated to realms of financial scarcity and restricted prospects. Such viewpoints may foster the continuation of the "European Dream," stimulating migration ambitions and, in certain instances, heightening migrants' susceptibility to trafficking and exploitation (Mains et al., 2013).

Postcolonial Theory offers a comprehensive structural framework for comprehending the imbalanced dynamics between Africa and Europe, with its gender aspect being crucial for the examination of *Òlòtùré*. Spivak's notion of the subaltern woman serves as an effective link between postcolonial critique and the gendered narratives depicted in the film. Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern highlights how marginalized individuals, especially women in post-colonial contexts, may be stripped of voice, agency, and significant representation in prevailing power structures. In the framework of *Òlòtùré*, this viewpoint facilitates an analysis of the positioning of at-risk Nigerian women within overlapping systems of patriarchy, economic deprivation, migratory regulation, and human trafficking. The female characters in the film are not merely migrants impacted by inequitable global dynamics; they are also gendered individuals whose susceptibility is exacerbated by the demand for sexual labour and by patriarchal systems that limit their economic and social autonomy.

Contemporary migration studies (Vlase, 2024; Reinecke & Löhr, 2024; Lemberg-Pedersen et al., 2024) have progressively utilized postcolonial frameworks to illustrate the links between current migratory patterns and colonial histories as well as inequitable global dynamics. Mains et al. (2013) contend in *Postcolonial Migrations* that colonial legacies persist in shaping identities, mobility, and migratory trends. Collins (2022) likewise illustrates how modern migration policies and border systems can perpetuate inequitable power dynamics and marginalize viewpoints from the Global South. These viewpoints indicate that migration cannot be perceived merely as a personal choice, but should also be analyzed in the context of historical, political, and economic frameworks that influence individuals' mobility and prospects.

The postcolonial viewpoint has likewise been utilized in the examination of human trafficking. Haynes (2025) contends that certain anti-trafficking measures may perpetuate colonial ideologies by depicting developing nations predominantly in terms of victimization while upholding stringent migratory policies. In a similar vein, Kotiswaran (2019) contextualizes trafficking within the larger frameworks of postcolonial disparity, labour exploitation, and economic reliance, rather than solely regarding it as a matter of organized crime. These assertions pertain to *Òlòtùré*, where destitution, corruption, limited economic prospects, gender disparity, and the glorification of European affluence foster an environment conducive to trafficking and exploitation.

The incorporation of Spivak's gender-focused viewpoint enhances this postcolonial analysis by highlighting the unique experiences of women within these frameworks. In *Òlòtūré*, women migrants find themselves in a notably precarious situation as their migrating desires coincide with patriarchal oppression and the market's need for sexual labour. Their physiques serve as arenas for the exertion of economic, gendered, and multinational power dynamics. The film depicts trafficking not merely as a result of economic hardship or imbalanced Africa-Europe dynamics, but also as a gendered framework wherein women's susceptibility is generated and exploited.

Consequently, Postcolonial Theory serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this research, although Spivak's notion of the subaltern woman offers a gender-aware enhancement of the framework. This integrated methodology allows for an analysis of *Òlòtūré* at both structural and gender dimensions: Postcolonial Theory reveals the historical disparities, international power dynamics, and economic frameworks that inform migration desires, whereas the subaltern viewpoint emphasizes the marginalization, limited agency, and gender-specific exploitation faced by the women depicted in the film. The approach thereby expands the examination beyond personal migrant decisions to the overlapping historical, political, economic, and patriarchal systems that generate vulnerability and perpetuate trafficking.

Methodology

This paper employs textual analysis to examine migration, human trafficking, and the European Dream in Kenneth Gyang's *Òlòtūré* (2019). Textual analysis is appropriate for the study because it enables the researcher to examine how films construct meaning through narrative and formal elements. Redmond (2016) explains that close textual analysis can be employed to investigate the manner in which a film generates meaning by analyzing its scenes and sequences, which include shot composition, lighting, setting, performance, sound, editing, plot, and narrative. Similarly, Caton (2019) integrates the interpretation of visual materials into systematic methods of visual text analysis. Accordingly, *Òlòtūré* was selected as the primary textual data and subjected to close analysis of scenes and sequences that address migration aspirations, the idealisation of Europe, trafficking and recruitment, deception and manipulation, the exploitation of female migrants, and the contrast between the realities of abuse and survival and the anticipated prosperity associated with Europe. The selected scenes were determined by their relevance to the research questions and their contribution to the study's central themes.

The analysis proceeded from description to interpretation. The analysis examined selected scenes in terms of dialogue, character interaction, setting, costume, camera framing, sound, symbolism, and other relevant cinematic elements. These observations were then interpreted through the study's postcolonial theoretical framework. Said's (1978) concept of representation in *Orientalism* was used to examine how Europe and Africa are constructed through contrasting images and assumptions, particularly the idealisation of Europe and the representation of Africa. Spivak's (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was employed to examine the vulnerability, exploitation, constrained agency, and silencing of the female characters within patriarchal and trafficking structures. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence and hybridity were employed to analyze the conflicting aspirations, identities, and cultural perceptions that arise from the encounters of migrants with Europe. Through this approach, the study moves beyond plot description to examine how *Òlòtūré* represents and critiques the social, gendered, and postcolonial conditions associated with irregular migration and human trafficking.

Data Analysis and Discussions

Kenneth Gyang's *Òlòtūré* explores irregular migration, human trafficking, and the myth of Europe as a place of unlimited possibilities. The film follows *Òlòtūré*, an undercover journalist who investigates a prostitution network in Lagos. It highlights how economic deprivation, gendered vulnerability, limited livelihood opportunities and global disparities make vulnerable African women targets of transnational exploitation. Rather than portraying migration as a personal choice, the film depicts it as a product of structural imbalances and broken systems that drive people to fantasize futures overseas (Fanu et al., 2023). The film was influenced by the undercover investigation into human trafficking conducted by

Nigerian investigative journalist Tobore Ovuorie, which was published in 2014 by Premium Times and ZAM. Ovuorie documented the recruitment and exploitation of women seeking opportunities abroad and the hazardous conditions imposed by traffickers during a four-month undercover stint within trafficking networks. The investigative account offers a crucial factual context for *Òlòtūrè*, illustrating that the film's depiction of trafficking is based on documented investigative experiences rather than being a purely fictional construction (Jimoh, 2023).

Migration and the Construction of the European Dream: *Òlòtūrè*, translated “Endurance,” presents the story of *Òlòtūrè*, the protagonist, played by Sandra Ooja, a brilliant and beautiful young journalist who risks her life to reveal the facts of sex trafficking. Ezepe (2022) similarly characterizes *Òlòtūrè* as an undercover journalist whose investigation into sex trafficking ultimately exposes her to the same perils as the women she is investigating. This transition from observer to participant is crucial because it allows the film to portray trafficking as a system that can ensnare even those who intentionally engage it, rather than merely an external social issue. The film delves into the European Dream mirage, demonstrating how the promise of economic independence and a better life abroad tempt vulnerable women to embark on risky migration routes. The traffickers capitalize on the idealized image of Europe by portraying it as a destination of guaranteed success. Women are driven not to trafficking, but to promises of opportunity and transformation, echoing postcolonial disparities that cast the West as a symbol of development and former colonies as spaces of deprivation.

In the film, the women's desire to migrate is influenced by economic hardship and the prospect of a brighter future (Fanu et al., 2023). Characters like Blessing, Linda and Beauty represent vulnerabilities including poverty, unemployment and family pressure. For example, when Blessing speaks to Madam Alero (min. 55), she says: “I want make my level change”, translated as “I want to transform my economic status for good”. Similarly, when Linda speaks to her sister, Beauty, over the phone (min. 61), she tells her: “Once we reach Europe, we fit send better money dome back” (Once we arrive in Europe, we will have enough money to support our family back home), demonstrating how the prospect of financial change propels their migratory fantasies. This representation aligns with Ernest-Onuiri et al.'s (2021) observation that the women in the film are drawn to what appears to be an opportunity to work and improve their lives abroad, only to discover that the promised opportunity is actually exploitation and manipulation. This illustration highlights the contrast between women's original migration desires and coercive situations. When they travel, they may not consent to trafficking, but the film reveals how trafficking networks can exploit genuine economic goals. Their migration aspirations are shaped by real societal conditions, but trafficking networks capitalize on these legitimate hopes by portraying Europe as a symbol of escape and success. Gyang questions the notion that migrants make poor decisions, presenting irregular migration as a complex result of structural imbalances in which departing appears to provide hope in the face of economic despair. *Òlòtūrè* argues that inequality, rather than personal failure, often drives irregular migration. As a result, the film focuses on the mechanisms that distort migrants' desires rather than individual responsibility. This reading expands on Ernest-Onuiri et al.'s (2021) remark that the women accept what appears to be a legitimate job opportunity abroad, while the exploitative conditions of their relocation are hidden from them. When they seemed confused about their itinerary to Europe and asked questions, they were screamed at, pushed and ordered around. They were cut off from family and friends as their phones were disconnected. They were psychologically bamboozled into taking blood oaths of death in nudes while lying in a coffin, which left terror all over their faces. These scenes show the gradual change of migration from an apparent voluntary enterprise to a system of forceful control. Ezepe (2022) also observes that the deceit surrounding the women's travel gets more severe as the reality of trafficking replaces their aspirations of Europe. Thus, the film depicts the European Dream as a device that initially attracts women but is later exploited by traffickers to maintain control.

Human Trafficking as an Economy of Exploitation: The film portrays human trafficking as a thriving criminal system based on the exploitation of defenceless women. *Òlòtūrè* depicts trafficking as a network involving recruiters, pimps, corrupt officials and international links. Women are dehumanized and treated as commodities to be purchased, exchanged and controlled, rather than as persons with dreams and identities. Ernest-Onuiri et al. (2021) endorse this interpretation, identifying female sex trafficking, sexual violence, and manipulation as essential elements of the film's portrayal of

the trafficking system. Their study supports the claim that the film depicts trafficking as an organized framework of exploitation rather than isolated acts of individual wrongdoing.

Madame Alero personifies the complexities of human trafficking networks. She is both an exploiter and a victim of the same oppressive system. Her recruitment of young women exemplifies how trafficking perpetuates itself via people who have been influenced by economic deprivation and exploitation. However, the film does not justify her acts; rather, it demonstrates how oppressive systems generate cycles in which victims become accomplices in the persecution of others. Akpore (2024) recognizes Madam Alero as a problematic figure within the trafficking system, noting that, despite her role as a recruiter and broker, she is susceptible to the network's patriarchal power dynamics. Alero's character demonstrates that membership in an exploitative system does not necessarily imply equal power within that system. Similarly, Chuks portrays the brutal masculine power systems that enable trafficking. His dominance over the ladies demonstrates how trafficking is inextricably linked to gendered violence. In colloquial English, he says to the despairing *Òlòtūrè*: "Anything wey big man do person, you suppose just take am as experience... Nothing we you fit take big man do" (min. 47). Translated in proper English, the above would mean: "Whatever a wealthy man does to you, take it as part of life's experience. You are incapable of succeeding in seeking justice or retribution against a person like this". In other words, Chuks merely asks *Òlòtūrè* to lick her wounds and shelve her intentions for retribution because the discrepancy in class and social rank between her and her rapist was unimaginable.

This scene underscores Ezepue's (2022) view that the film depicts gender-based violence through unequal outcomes for men and women. Male authority, social standing, and economic privilege limit women's access to justice, as shown in Chuks and Sir Philip. Akpore (2024) also sees Chuks's depiction of women as patriarchal, exploiting female characters physically and psychologically. The scene shows that economic incentives and gendered power systems that normalize violence against women support trafficking. At minute 64:10, Victor sternly warns the women, all of whom were now in his and his gang's exclusive custody, "From now until we comot from here, no more communication with anybody outside (Nigeria)," which means: "From here on until you depart Nigeria, you all are forbidden from communicating with anyone outside," limiting their contact with others. This depicts the control, hostage situation and isolation techniques employed by traffickers to hold captives hostage and prevent escape or exposure.

The restriction on communication is especially significant since it represents the point at which women's movement is accompanied with a loss of social autonomy. Their phones, relationships, and access to outside support are gradually revoked, transforming movement into captivity. According to Ernest-Onuiri et al. (2021), the film *Òlòtūrè* depicts the trafficking experience as characterized by manipulation and denial of freedom. Women's bodies become sites where commercial interests, patriarchal dominance and criminal power intersect. These frames depict women and girls as erotic objects that stimulate sexual impulses. Akpore (2024) contends that the film emphasizes female gender exploitation and portrays its women as victims of a patriarchal system in which their bodies are physically, sexually, and psychologically abused. The film's distressing depictions of brothels, recruitment processes and forced travel reflect the reality that trafficking is frequently concealed behind the guise of legitimate opportunities. The traffickers rarely position themselves as criminals; rather, they present themselves as givers of solutions. They exploit trust, cultural expectations and economic need. This misconception is critical to understanding why trafficking persists, despite public awareness campaigns.

The Illusion of Freedom and the Reality of Enslavement: *Òlòtūrè* emphasizes the contrast between imagined freedom and actual confinement. Although the ladies see migration as a way out of poverty, their trip becomes a type of imprisonment, moving them from one vulnerability to another. The film demonstrates that trafficking involves both physical movement and psychological control. The ladies are ensnared by promises of a brighter future, as the European Dream is used to manipulate and disguise the perils of exploitation. This dichotomy between movement and imprisonment is crucial to the film's portrayal of trafficking. Women are transplanted across geographical spaces but gain no independence. Mobility becomes a control mechanism. Ernest-Onuiri et al. (2021) note that the

seeming opportunity to travel abroad masks exploitation, while Ezepue (2022) notes that deception, trauma, and uncertainty replace women's aspirations of Europe.

Òlòtūrè's trip exemplifies the conflict. Although she enters the trafficking realm freely as an undercover journalist, her inquiry exposes her to the same risks that victims confront. The film blurs the distinction between observer and victim, emphasizing the strength of trafficking networks (Olakunbi-Black, 2025). According to Ezepue (2022), *Òlòtūrè*'s position as an investigator grows more vulnerable as she penetrates the trafficking network. Its ambiguous finale symbolizes the fact that many victims receive neither rescue nor justice. Furthermore, the majority of the females in the film are killed in a brutal conflict between opposing trafficking organizations, leaving just Ehi and her friend alive. The bleak ending matches Ezepue's (2022) reading, which emphasizes the trafficking women's uncertain future. The film does not resolve trafficking's effects. This narrative choice reinforces the film's critique by demonstrating that individual escape does not necessarily fix trafficking's systemic conditions.

Gender, Poverty and the Feminization of Migration: Gyang's film emphasizes the gendered nature of migration and trafficking, demonstrating how economic disparity, sexism and limited possibilities exacerbate women's vulnerabilities. Women in *Òlòtūrè* are exploited not only due to economic deprivation, but also due to their gender and social status, making them easy targets. The film explores how female bodies become commodities in the trafficking economy, where women's sexuality is controlled and exploited for profit. In *Òlòtūrè*, girls are sexually objectified and coerced into degrading positions, being portrayed as tools for male desire. Akpore (2024) found that the film *Òlòtūrè* portrays women as victims of exploitation in a patriarchal social structure, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The film's depiction of migration and trafficking is linked to the women's gendered exploitation in this perspective. Gender is intertwined with poverty, migratory goals, and trafficking business organizations in *Òlòtūrè*.

Gyang criticizes a culture in which women are forced to use unsafe measures to survive due to a lack of chances. However, the women are not shown as powerless or passive characters who lack agency; they have dreams, intelligence and resilience, while their options are limited by wider social and economic pressures. This qualification protects women from being passive victims. Akpore (2024) emphasizes their exploitation but also portrays various female characters with distinct aims, relationships, and resistance. *Òlòtūrè*'s investigation of the trafficking network, Beauty's escape, and the women's struggles show agency in confined situations. The paucity of arrests, charges, or convictions for traffickers in *Òlòtūrè* highlights how culprits frequently avoid punishment. Their capacity to kill and continue their operations underlines the dangers that women and girls confront when crimes against them go unpunished, resulting in a society in which exploitation can continue without consequences.

Postcolonial Interpretation of the European Dream: From a postcolonial perspective, *Òlòtūrè* analyzes the long-term impacts of colonial inequality (Olakunbi-Black, 2025). Although colonialism has ended, the economic inequities and global inequalities it produced continue to impact migratory patterns and drive people to seek better chances elsewhere. The European Dream in *Òlòtūrè* perpetuates colonial stereotypes of Europe as a source of achievement and Africa as a refuge. Gyang challenges this notion by demonstrating that Europe may also become a site of exploitation, highlighting how global inequities fuel migration and trafficking. This interpretation places women's experiences in an international context, complementing Akpore (2024) and Ernest-Onuiri et al. (2021)'s gender- and trafficking-focused analyzes. These studies show how patriarchal and trafficking systems exploit women, but this analysis examines how Europe's idealization promotes migration as an escape from economic misery. Thus, the European Dream is both a postcolonial fantasy and a trafficking tool.

Cinematic Representation of Trauma and Realism: Gyang's use of realism adds to the film's societal criticism by depicting the brutal reality of trafficking without romanticizing migration. The film creates a documentary-like ambiance by using authentic Lagos locations, local languages and everyday experiences, focusing on the human reality behind trafficking rather than abstract numbers. Ezepue (2022) also notes the film's depiction of Lagos as a socially and culturally diverse city, highlighting its many neighborhoods and daily life. The trafficking tale takes place in familiar Nigerian settings and connections, proving the film's socioeconomic reality. The lack of a conventional happy ending contributes to the persistence of trafficking. Gyang holds the audience in suspense, reflecting the

unsolved realities of many victims, whose stories often lack justice or resolution. Kenneth Gyang's ending differs from traditional Nollywood storytelling in that it depicts the exploited women's uncertain and grim future. Ezepue (2022) also note that the film's ending leaves the women's futures unknown and dismal, defying Nollywood expectations. Instead of emphasizing that the problem ends when individual criminals are defeated, the video shows the vulnerability of trafficked women. *Òlòtūrè* depicts the brutal realities of victims who must endure demeaning and life-threatening conditions, without presenting false hope or closure.

Conclusion

Kenneth Gyang's film *Òlòtūrè* is a strong cinematic critique of irregular migration, human trafficking, and the persistent mirage of the European Dream. The film's realistic Sy, compelling characterization and unflinching depiction of exploitation demonstrate that the desire to migrate is the result of deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities, gendered vulnerabilities and the lingering effects of colonial power relations. Rather than depicting Europe as a guaranteed source of riches, the film deconstructs this idealized image by showing the brutality, deception and dehumanization that often accompany irregular migration through trafficking networks.

This paper holds that *Òlòtūrè* transcends entertainment to function as an important medium of social intervention, exposing the realities of human trafficking while stimulating critical reflection on migration, justice, and human dignity. The film contributes profoundly to contemporary discussions about migration, postcolonial inequality and gendered exploitation by debunking the concept of the European Dream and emphasizing the lived experiences of trafficked women. The study emphasizes the importance of Nigerian cinema as a platform for social advocacy, public awareness, and policy discussions aimed at addressing the root causes of irregular migration, strengthening anti-trafficking initiatives and promoting the protection of vulnerable populations.

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