

Preface

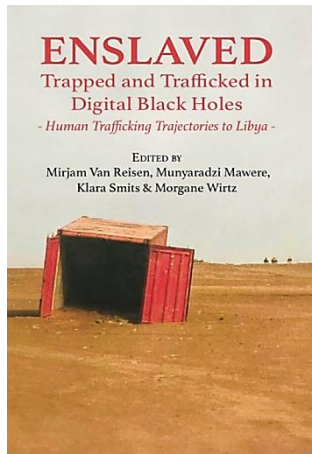
Honourable Chief Fortune Charumbira

Preface in: Enslaved

Trapped and Trafficked in Digital Black Holes:
Human Trafficking Trajectories to Libya

From the book Series:

Connected and Mobile: Migration and Human Trafficking in Africa



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Preface by Honourable Chief Fortune Charumbira

Reading this book titled ‘Enslaved’, my eye fell on a quote from an interview with a person who was trapped in a human trafficking warehouse. This person asked: “It is like slavery, or is it slavery?”

This was the same question I was asking as I read this book. As I turned, page after page, I realised that what is being described as human trafficking for ransom is actually slavery. I counted the word ‘slave’ 258 times.

But, how is this possible? Slavery was abolished in 1865.

When it was abolished, slavery was defined as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”.¹ In those days, the ownership of a person was set out in a legal paper. From this book, I understand that, today, ownership is set out in a digital code. This ownership refers to the complete control of one person over another, and is realised through the use of violence. This violence is perpetrated through physical and psychological means and leaves deep trauma. For example, alleged trafficker Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, who is also mentioned in this book, has been described as using the cruellest ways to pressure and humiliate the victims he holds hostage. He is said to have organised football matches between his victims in Libya. According to an eyewitness, those who missed a goal were shot, while the team that won was ‘rewarded’ by being forced to rape women hostages.²

This sadistic violence defines slavery in Libya today, in which human beings are treated and traded as commodities, and held solely for this purpose. If they are no longer profitable, these people disappear, and

¹ League of Nations. (1926). *Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery*, 25 September 1926, 60 LNTS 253, Registered No. 1414. Geneva: League of Nations

² Hayden, S. (2021). *How did one of North Africa’s biggest accused smugglers escape prison?* [Online], 100 Reporters, 24 February 2021. <https://100r.org/2021/02/how-did-one-of-north-africas-biggest-smugglers-escape-prison/>; on Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam, see also <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-sudan-arrest-world-most-wanted-human-trafficker>

many are suspected to have died. The trafficking in persons, of human beings, who are held in undignified and dehumanising circumstances, has the sole purpose of creating desperation, to encourage people to beg their relatives to pay for their release.

However, those held in slavery are not acknowledged as slaves; that is what this book tells us. They are not allowed to communicate their situation in person to representatives of humanitarian organisations or to use the Internet to bring attention to their plight. Those who disappear, who have perhaps succumbed to torture or drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, are left unburied, their families uninformed about their fate and their restless souls with no chance of finding the eternal peace they deserve. It is as if they do not exist.

It is staggering that this form of slavery has already happened to hundreds of thousands of Africans – over two-hundred thousand, according to a conservative estimate in this book. This trade has generated over 1 billion USD in revenue. It is profitable and, therefore, it expands.

In Africa and in Europe, so few know of this desperate and objectionable situation. Any reasonable fellow, African or European, would oppose this practice. As President of the Pan African Parliament, I would like to emphasise that the Parliament represents everyone. Every person in Africa, no matter what their situation, is represented by us. We are the Parliament of the people of Africa. As a Parliament, we take it on ourselves to inform others of the fate of those being trafficked and enslaved, so that we can change this situation.

The truth is that we live in a digital world, from where we get our news and information – we think that it is all on the Internet. But our fellow human beings, who are being kept as slaves in Libya, do not have access to a mobile phone, to the Internet, to social media. The only information that comes from them is what they are allowed to communicate: the amount of the ransom, where and how to transfer it, and photos and videos showing their desperate situation to encourage the ransom to be paid, quickly and quietly.

These places where communication is controlled by the traffickers are called ‘black holes’ in the digital landscape. They are black holes in many ways – the light does not come out of the darkness that defines the camps, warehouses, detention centres, and torture houses that form a string of black holes on these trajectories, controlled by the human trafficking networks. Enticing people to go to Europe, the traffickers deceive their victims with broken promises.

This situation is intolerable. It affects the dignity of Africans and the relationship between Africa and Europe. I will not rest until all Africans are recognised as full human beings. The Pan African Parliament will make it its highest priority to restore the dignity of each and every African person. The trade in persons as commodities, as described in this book, is not of this time – not of any time. As the President of the people’s institution of Africa, I say that the enslavement of African people must stop.

Fortune Charumbira

President of the Pan African Parliament

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