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# EXPLORING 'JUJU' AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING: TOWARDS A DEMYSTIFIED PERSPECTIVE AND RESPONSE

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## ABSTRACT

An existing hiatus in empirical research related to the use of 'juju' rituals as a spiritual or psychological control mechanism by perpetrators to subjugate victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation has underscored the need for this exploratory study. The phenomenon is shrouded in secrecy and little is known about what juju entails and how it is used to subdue victims. The aim of this article is to explore juju as a phenomenon, whilst illuminating some of the multi-layered complexities associated with its use as a control mechanism. The available literature and in-depth interviews with local and international actors in the field contributed to the unveiling of this phenomenon in the South African and broader counter-trafficking context. The research confirmed that juju is in fact a reality that numerous victims of Nigerian traffickers have to contend with. The article clarifies how traffickers use juju rituals as an effective control mechanism and catalyst to instil profound fear amongst victims, whilst compounding efforts by response agencies and criminal justice practitioners to combat human trafficking. Finally, suggestions for a more informed counter-trafficking response and recommendations for future research are offered which include the need for a variety of perspectives to be incorporated in the quest for a better understanding of juju and the human trafficking nexus.

**Keywords:** victims of trafficking, Nigerian human trafficking, juju, voodoo, sexual exploitation



## INTRODUCTION

The trade in human beings is by no means a recent phenomenon (Allais 2013: 42; Aromaa 2007: 13). However,

in contrast to historical slavery systems characterised by whips, chains, and physical imprisonment, modern day slavery is less overt, typically with no obvious visible signs of restraint. Rather, psychological abuse, coercion and mental manipulation play a powerful role in forcing modern day slaves to work in a variety of industries. (Dando, Welsh and Brierly 2016: 1)

Human trafficking is a complex crime that has been explored by a range of disciplines that continue to intersect and engage with the phenomenon (Laczko 2007: 42; Lee 2007: 1–2). Yet, 'there are more discoveries to be made' as traffickers continue to devise effective means to exploit people (Ikeora 2016: 10). Several studies have reported on the inherent multidimensional complexities associated with effectively combating human trafficking (Aronowitz 2009; Holmes 2010; Morehouse 2009; Verhoeven and Van Gestel 2011: 148) whilst Farrell, Owens and McDevitt (2014: 139) point to a knowledge vacuum regarding the true nature of the crime and the extent to which anti-trafficking strategies are in fact effective. One area in human trafficking research that lacks sound empirical exploration is the accompanying complex interactions between offenders and victims (Kleemans 2011: 95). Various control methods to silence and subdue victims form part of these interactions. Dando et al. (2016: 1) emphasise that since psychological control is much easier to conceal than the physical restraint and captivity of victims, it poses significant challenges to recognise and efficiently respond to this modern day form of slavery. The current study explored a unique form of cultural-related psychological control, namely the use of juju rituals to manipulate victims of sex trafficking.

South Africa is known as a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children who are exploited mainly through forced labour and sex trafficking (Swart 2012: 62; US Department of State 2015: 308). The 2016 Global Slavery Index (Walk Free Foundation 2016: 143) found that South Africa had an estimated 248 700 people living in conditions of modern slavery, of whom 43 per cent were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in a sex industry thriving on the street, in brothels and at private residences. Women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation, and Nigerian perpetrators, known for dominating the local commercial sex trade in several South African provinces (US Department of State 2016: 340; Walk Free Foundation 2016: 143), were the focus of the exploratory study. According to Oshundun (2013), more than 250 000 Nigerian nationals are living in South Africa and more than 400 are in prison serving various jail terms. Warming diplomatic ties between South Africa and Nigeria (Oyedele 2016) and an estimated 50 000 annual Nigerian tourists visiting the South African shores bear evidence of the two regions' connection (Vanguard 2016).

From 2014, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) reported an increase in the Western Cape in the number of Nigerian sex trafficking victims, many coerced

through juju or voodoo rituals (US Department of State 2015: 309, 2016: 340). The use of such methods by Nigerian traffickers as a means of control over their victims became a point of discussion after a seminar hosted by the University of South Africa in 2014. Delegates from the counter-trafficking community across South Africa and other African countries gained insight from New Scotland Yard detective and international expert, Andy Desmond, who presented a case study on how juju (see exposition of the construct below) is used by Nigerian traffickers as an arcane control mechanism over their victims. His message resonated with delegates, many of whom have been struggling to come to grips with this illusive concept and the reality of the fear experienced by victims controlled and exploited by Nigerian perpetrators.<sup>1</sup> A lack of in-depth local and international knowledge on how juju as a phenomenon or practice intersects with the perpetration of human trafficking prompted the authors to conduct an exploratory study of juju that was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is juju and how is it used in the trafficking of persons?
2. Why is an understanding of the juju control mechanism relevant to the South African and broader counter-trafficking community?

The aim of the article is, firstly, to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of juju and its nexus with human trafficking by exploring the lived realities of those who experienced the phenomenon. Secondly, it serves as a response to the call for further empirical research on control methods used in sex trafficking (Ioannou and Oostinga 2015: 35), juju and a demystified contemporary understanding of 'African traditional belief linked to human trafficking' (Ikeora 2016: 15). An overview of the available literature follows which aims to deconstruct juju as a phenomenon whilst exploring its intersection with the perpetration of human trafficking. The methodology that underpinned the exploratory study will then be explicated whereafter the findings are integrated into a discussion. Data from international expert interviews is interwoven throughout the article to compliment the literature and lived experiences of South African participants who formed part of the study. The article concludes with suggestions for responses by the counter-trafficking community, and offers recommendations for future research.

## AN OPERATIONAL DECONSTRUCTION OF JUJU

The term 'juju' originated from Nigeria's colonial history and language (Aghatise, Expert interview 6 November 2015). The term apparently stems from the French word '*joujou*', which means 'a toy' (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c). As far back as in the fifteenth century, the Europeans who arrived in West Africa used the word for the locals' pouches that contained small items, such as powder, plant and animal substances. The local inhabitants wore these pouches around their bodies and believed that the contents brought them good luck and provided protection (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c;

US Department of State 2013: 45). Juju refers to a multifaceted, secretive phenomenon and, in general, 'the collective traditional ancestral religious beliefs of the Yuroba people of Southwest Nigeria' (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015a). Similarly, Aghatise (Expert interview 6 November 2015) states that in the local Nigerian context, 'juju covers a wide range of traditional practices that are local[ly] based ones and ... to some extent religious practices'.

Terms such as 'juju', 'voodoo', 'woodoo', 'vodo' and 'vudu' are frequently used interchangeably in various sources (UNICRI 2010: 15–16;37; Taliani 2012: 589). However, the meanings of these concepts are often vague and ambivalent, and various sources and actors use the same concept with different interpretations of the meaning thereof (Van Dijk 2001: 560).

The use of juju is widespread in Nigeria, though the type of traditional practices that are referred to as juju vary from one ethnic group to the other. The two ethnic groups whose traditional practices are relatively similar are 'the Edos of the ancient Kingdom of Benin and the Yorubas, both from the South West of Nigeria, probably due to their history and origin from a common ancestor' (Aghatise, Expert interview 6 November 2015).

An indomitable belief in the supernatural, which includes witchcraft, voodoo or juju practices, prevails in West Africa, and especially in Nigeria (Baarda 2016: 258; Johnson, Thompson and Perry 1990: 56–57; Nwauche 2008: 35). Still, as Nwauche (2008: 40–45) points out, these traditional religious practices are treated in a contradictory manner in the Nigerian legal system. On the one hand, the Nigerian Criminal Code from colonial origin criminalises witchcraft and various juju rituals in spite of their widespread acceptance in traditional communities. On the other hand, despite some emerging criticism, the judiciary recognises the legal validity of some juju practices customarily coupled with oath-taking as part of binding customary law arbitration (Nwauche 2008: 51–55; Oba 2008: 139, 142).

Oba (2008: 139–141) confirms that traditional oaths, a commonly accepted method of resolving disputes in Africa, bind parties and play a decisive role in customary law arbitration. Relevant to the current study is that by swearing on a so-called dreaded juju charm, 'the swearer invokes on himself a conditional curse. He tells the juju to punish him if he lies ... it is believed that anyone who swears falsely will be dead or smitten with grave misfortune' (Oba 2008: 141).

Oba (2008: 157) emphasises that juju oaths thus have a psychological basis, namely the belief that the gods will severely punish any person who does not comply with the oath. In short, it is accepted, especially in traditional cultural settings, that harmful supernatural consequences are attached to false oaths. Thus, notwithstanding the legislative prohibition of juju rituals, these longstanding traditional rites, sometimes even combined with so-called magical juju-soup medicines, are undeniably practised and embedded in the everyday life of Nigerian communities (Johnson et al. 1990: 56–57).

## JUJU AND THE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

The main aim of human trafficking is to generate illegal profits by exploiting compliant victims. Defiant victims resist exploitation and obstruct the purpose of the trafficking enterprise. For this reason, traffickers use any control method to keep their victims submissive at all cost. Stuurman (2004: 5) rightly emphasises that control and power over victims are unequivocally a key characteristic of human trafficking. Article 3(b) of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN 2000), clearly provides that a victim does not legally consent to the exploitation and thus does not perform the services voluntarily. For this reason, traffickers must ensure victims' compliance by using coercive and deceptive control methods to subjugate them and in this way overcome any resistance (UNODC 2009: module 4).

Nigerian traffickers use juju rituals as a unique control method to exercise maximum domination over their victims. Having full knowledge that the belief in the supernatural and juju practices regulates the lives of many Nigerian communities, the traffickers deceitfully manipulate this reality to control victims for sexual exploitation (Baarda 2016: 259). The current study explored how this distinctive Nigerian *modus operandi* is used to overpower victims.

The Anti-trafficking Consultants (2015c) and others (Aghatise 2004: 1131; Okogbule 2013: 65; Van Dijk 2001: 565) underscore the fact that human traffickers of the Edo and Delta states in Nigeria have hijacked the cultural beliefs in juju to exercise psychological control over their victims. Baarda (2016: 259) asserts that from the 1980s, priests adapted juju rituals to accommodate the specific needs and demands of Nigerian sex traffickers. At the beginning of the trafficking process, the trafficker pays a priest to perform a juju ceremony on the potential victim prior to her departure from Nigeria to the destination country (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Aronowitz 2009: 60; Taliani 2012: 581; US Department of State 2013: 45; Van Dijk 2001: 564–565). Traffickers, as paying clients, hire the priests' services to enhance the success of their trafficking enterprise, since both traffickers as well as victims believe that juju priests have 'the power to manipulate the outcomes of people's lives' (Baarda 2016: 259, 268). The juju ceremony is often repeated in the destination country to reinforce victims' compliance (Mojeed 2008; Van Dijk 2001: 564–565). This reinforcing ritual is described by Dunkerley (Expert interview 5 November 2015) as a 'modified version' that the trafficker will perform at the relevant place of destination. It is believed that this ritual reinforces both the power the trafficker has over the victim as well as the oath taken in the presence of the juju priest back in Nigeria. Therefore, it can be considered to be an 'extra mechanism of maintaining control'.

The juju ceremony used to control victims is a multidimensional and supernatural event with far-reaching consequences. The ceremony starts when the victim is brought to the juju priest at a shrine. Here she is ordered to undress, which instils acute vulnerability in the victim (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015b). The priest then chants

over a bowl of soot while calling upon a spirit, aligned with the evil god Eshu, to enter the soot (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; UNICRI 2010: 38). Thereafter, the priest makes numerous cuts with a razor blade all over the victim's body and rubs the soot, purportedly containing the spirit, into the open wounds (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Baarda 2016: 259). It is believed that in this way the spirit enters the victim's body and she can never escape from the spirit. The priest further collects samples of human tissue from the victim, such as menstrual blood, nails, as well as scalp, underarm and pubic hair (Aghatise 2004: 1130; Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Aronowitz 2009: 60; Kara 2009: 90; UNICRI 2010: 38; Van Dijk 2001: 564, 569). These items have a symbolic meaning and are placed in so-called 'small packages' that are usually given to the traffickers or 'madams' (UNICRI 2010: 38). A so-called 'madam' or 'maman' is usually an older Nigerian woman who has been a trafficked victim, but paid off her debt by prostituting herself and then moving from being a victim to a trafficking accomplice. A madam operates as a female pimp in the destination country and buys, manages and 'owns' her own trafficked girls until they have repaid their debt to her (Aronowitz 2009: 57; Baarda 2016: 258; Kara 2009: 91; UNICRI 2010: 11, 30;). A part of the human material taken from the victim, together with her underwear, is often also sealed in a vessel at the shrine (Aghatise 2004: 1130 Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Aronowitz 2009: 60).

After the first part of the ceremony has been completed, the important oath-taking contract follows. While standing at the effigy of the god, Eshu, the victim is instructed to repeat the words that the priest dictates (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015b). The victim must swear that she will pay back the 'incurred' debt owed to the trafficker or 'madam' and that she will never disclose their identity (Aghatise 2004: 1130–1131; Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Aronowitz 2009: 57; Kara 2009: 91). Therefore, debt bondage is a solemn consequence of the juju contract and the victim will eventually repay the debt by prostituting herself in the destination country (Baarda 2016: 265). The use of the juju oath to seal the contract for repaying the debt 'chain[s] the young women and their families economically, morally and psychologically to their exploiters' (UNICRI 2010: 15–16). Significant to this study is the fact that the victim must further take an oath that she will meticulously obey every instruction from the trafficker and never run away (Aghatise 2004: 1131; Anti-trafficking consultants 2015c; Kara 2009: 90; Okogbule 2013: 65). It is emphasised that if she does not comply with the oath, Eshu will send spirits to severely punish and eventually kill her (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c). Therefore, victims comply out of fear for their own and their family's safety and welfare. Baarda (2016: 259) explains: 'Voodoo [or juju] plays into fears and beliefs that are latently present in Nigerian culture, which are then abused and adjusted into rituals specifically for the advantage of human traffickers.'

The oath-taking contract is concluded with a chicken being killed and its heart being removed, whereupon the victim is forced to eat the heart and drink an alcohol concoction (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c; Baarda 2016: 259, 265). Aghatise

(2004: 1130) reveals other bizarre actions, such as the victim being forced to drink water that has been used to wash a corpse. After the completion of the juju ceremony, the victim gets dressed again and leaves the shrine.

The study revealed that the distorted juju ceremony used to subdue victims does not have a fixed pattern (Taliani 2012: 589), therefore, juju ceremonies may differ from the basic ceremony described above. Traffickers use juju priests cunningly to tailor the ceremony to the circumstances of each case to best exploit the vulnerability of the victim (Baarda 2016: 259). In this manner, the most effective control over the victim is ensured to enhance the success of the illegal trafficking business. A multitude of factors make this use of juju a unique and highly effective control mechanism. Firstly, the use of juju rituals provokes profound fear, uncertainty and confusion, which seriously intensify victims' vulnerability and thus ensure their obedience (Baarda 2016: 259; Taliani 2012: 597). Moreover, juju rituals form part of the Nigerian culture and traditional religious belief system, which are solemnly complied with to ensure that the gods do not chastise the disobedient (Oba 2008: 154). After the juju ceremony and oath swearing, potential victims firmly believe that if they do not comply, they and their families will suffer the wrath of the spirits through grave misfortune and even death (Baarda 2016: 259). Taliani (2012: 582) posits that the abuse of juju ceremonies creates 'multiple layers of domination', resulting in a significant power imbalance and a relationship of dominance (Baarda 2016: 259). Therefore, victims controlled by juju rituals usually need not be physically locked up or supervised (Anti-trafficking Consultants 2015c). Instead of direct monitoring, the terror-inducing juju rituals enable traffickers to conveniently exercise remote control (Baarda 2016: 259). For this reason, the traffickers' abuse of juju rites is a powerful weapon and an effective method to control victims and ensure that they obey all instructions. Traditional, cultural and religious practices are an invaluable part of the Nigerian society. However, the current study has confirmed that Nigerian traffickers distort these practices and abuse the juju ceremony to effect human trafficking successfully.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

An open, flexible and unstructured mode of enquiry was facilitated by the selected qualitative design (Kumar 2014: 14) which served as a catalyst for the interviewees' voices to be heard. A qualitative design allowed for the exploration of the multidimensional and multi-layered complexities of juju as a phenomenon, and the portrayal of juju-related experiences in a multifaceted form (Leedy and Ormrod 2013: 139). Within the qualitative design, interview data obtained from an on-going phenomenological study was used. Exploratory research (Kumar 2014: 13) was conducted, as juju and its



intersection with human trafficking remains a phenomenon of which little is known in practice, with available scholarly work gradually building momentum.

## Data collection and sampling

The data for the study was collected between November 2013 and July 2016. In addition to an extensive literature review, expert interviews, media reports and documentary productions, juju-related themes emerging from 23 in-depth and unstructured interviews formed part of the research. The 23 participants in the study were part of a larger sample of 71 participants included in an on-going PhD study undertaken by the primary author. The study explored the lived experiences of multidisciplinary role-players in the investigation of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Phenomenological interviews, between 45 and 150 minutes in length, were conducted with participants, who included police investigators, social workers, victims, traffickers, NGOs and members of civil society. From the 71 interviews, the phenomenon of juju emerged as a theme that the 23 participants included in the study experienced. The 23 participants included social workers and shelter personnel ( $n = 7$ ); law enforcement officers ( $n = 6$ ); NGO representatives ( $n = 3$ ); prosecutors ( $n = 2$ ); victims ( $n = 2$ ); a journalist ( $n = 1$ ); a trafficker ( $n = 1$ ); and a member of civil society ( $n = 1$ ). These experiences prompted further exploration of the phenomenon in the South African context and formed the basis for the study. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a qualified transcriber. The transcriptions were sanitised to ensure anonymity by allocating pseudonyms to participants and deleting any information which may facilitate the identification of participants. The transcribed data was imported into ATLAS.ti 7, a qualitative data analysis program.

Supplementing the aforementioned interviews, were interviews conducted with four international experts who were purposively selected for their experience and contribution to the global discourse surrounding the issue of juju and similar arcane methods used by Nigerian human traffickers. Three of the four interviews were conducted via Skype, whilst the interview with Desmond represented a prolonged case study interview (Yin 2014: 110–111) that was conducted by the primary author, comprising a guided and in-depth conversation that took place over an extended period from November 2013 to November 2014 and covered multiple in-person sittings in South Africa, the United States and Canada. The data from the expert interviews was not part of the data analysis process described below as the interviews were conducted subsequent to the data analysis process and were interwoven throughout the article. The expert interviews served to fill the gaps identified in the literature whilst providing meaning and context that was insufficiently clarified by the literature or the participants.

## Data analysis

The central steps in data analysis as highlighted by Creswell (2013: 180) were used to generate meaning from the data, including: reducing the data into meaningful segments and creating codes; combining the codes into broader categories or themes; and displaying and making comparisons in the data. A total of 93 codes related to juju were generated and collapsed into six themes, namely: (1) juju ritual and ceremony; (2) juju as a control mechanism; (3) victim profile and identification; (4) context, culture and belief systems; (5) South African knowledge, awareness and experience; and (6) anti-trafficking and criminal justice response. Due to the exploratory nature of the article, an overview of the significant insights was drawn from the themes and included in the findings and discussion. Subsequent publications will focus on the explication of the aforementioned themes that emerged from the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants' experiences confirmed the use of juju or a combination of arcane methods by Nigerian traffickers as a control measure over victims of trafficking in South Africa. The term 'juju' resonated with most of the participants, but included interchangeable references to 'witchcraft',<sup>2</sup> 'voodoo', 'spirits', 'muti', 'black magic', 'demons', 'satanism' and 'curses'. The data from the study suggested that victims of juju rituals included black and coloured South African females, as well as women of Nigerian descent. With regard to the use of juju on South African women, a counter-trafficking NGO director who worked as an outreach worker highlighted:

... they were also under this juju ... the guys took their blood, took their pubic hair, told them that you're cursed and it was just as real for them as it is for the Nigerian girls. They were just as afraid of these things ... So it's not necessarily just the Nigerian girls, it's the Nigerian pimps using it on local girls as well. It's this local African girls predominantly ... (NGO 1, Interview 30 March 2015)

Another participant, who worked as a shelter manager, shared her experience with regard to a victim of trafficking and juju:

... she was a South African woman ... she said she had the juju ceremonies performed on her and it had really affected her brain. She said she was married to a spiritual being and she was having a spiritual child or something ... they had to call the SAPS [police] because she had really gone wild. Three SAPS [police] fellows came here and I must say the older man was very understanding and he had a very good conversation with her. The other two sat here with their eyes like ... they couldn't believe what they were hearing. (SHT 1, Interview 26 March 2015)

The participants spoke about the rituals and ceremonies that victims of trafficking underwent and referred to the constituent aspects of these ceremonies, which included: cutting the skin; taking blood; clipping nails; removing scalp and pubic hair; using oils

and powders; having sexual intercourse; praying and chanting; and giving the victims 'stuff to eat'. Amulets, charms, necklaces, pouches and strings were some of the objects often found in victims' possession. As one victim of trafficking stated, "'juju' means there was 'something that the woman could carry ... when they go out and it works ... it covers them' (VOT 3, Interview 18 May 2015). A shelter administrator who also works as a street outreach worker shared his experiences obtained from a number of girls under the control of Nigerian pimps. He stated that girls had amulets around their necks and believed that if the amulets were removed, 'things would happen to their families, things would happen to them, things would happen to their children'. He continued by highlighting that the girls showed hostility when attempts were made to remove the amulets, and there was 'definitely a satanic or demonic element to what was happening' (SHT 2, Interview 15 April 2015). Traffickers also utilise fear-inducing narratives of death and misfortune as a means to reinforce and emphasise the severe consequences of absconding, disclosing or not obeying the oath:

... then they'll [traffickers] start the story around that she went to work with another guy or she took that off around her neck [amulet] and this is what happen[s] to her, her child disappeared. Nobody knows where her child is ... she got a sickness and she died. (SHT 2, Interview 15 April 2015)

According to the evidence obtained from the literature and interviews with experts, it is clear that juju ceremonies and rituals do not have a fixed pattern. What appears to be a variation of a juju ritual and the use of fear-inducing narratives was relayed by a South African victim of trafficking:

Apparently this other girl saw in the Nigerian place there was something like a glass and in that glass they were mixing sand and other black stuff that she couldn't understand and they were like water and there were names of all the girls that were working for him inside that thing and those girls they say they never ran away from him ... now and then he disappears into that room then when he comes out then the business just flows ... They were thinking that Nigerian guy put their names there for a reason to do something and there are a lot of scary stories that the girls used to talk. (VOT 4, Interview 24 June 2015)

In agreement with Taliani (2012: 597), the common denominators of profound fear, uncertainty, confusion and control were communicated by participants as the essential purpose that juju serves to infuse. The fear experienced by the victims persists, despite the trafficker not being physically present. This unwavering belief in the juju and the fear experienced by victims were explained by a shelter therapist:

... you can escape a trafficker, he's a physical person, you can run away but you can never escape from a spirit. It's always there ... hovering over you and [the spirit] can see your every move and punish you ... you can never escape a spirit. (SHT 6, Interview 13 May 2015)

The persisting fear experienced by the victims of trafficking in the absence of the trafficker is elucidated by Desmond, who metaphorically compares juju, as a control method used by traffickers, to a sheep dog that is used by a shepherd. The sheep dog

... keep[s] the sheep within a certain area so they don't run away or disappear. What's the point in having a herd of sheep if you just let them wander and disappear? So basically the juju is the sheepdog, is a way of keeping ... controlling them. (Desmond, Expert interview 29 May 2014)

Cultural congruencies, superstition, ancestral worship and sensitivity to the spiritual realm were highlighted by participants as predisposing factors to an actual belief in the power and control of juju. Ikeora (2016: 8) similarly refers to 'the traditional beliefs in ancestral spirits and the supernatural' by African communities that make them vulnerable to this form of control by traffickers. Congruency exists between this assertion by Ikeora (2016: 8) and the notion that in black cultures, such as Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho, psychological and physical health are often connected to contact with ancestors (Bergh 2003: 395). A Nigerian trafficker alluded to the significance of the spiritual realm when getting 'the one [victim]' who is going to 'stay with you' and stated that you have to 'work with the spirit'. If she leaves and does not return, it is because her 'spirit and your own didn't match' (STP 3, Interview 16 May 2015). One participant (NGO 4, Interview 13 May 2015), stated that 'mostly in Africa people believe in spirits and this animism is a world view of Africa'. Speaking about her interaction with victims of juju-related practices, a programme manager at a shelter highlighted:

... it's only ... the black ones (girls) and one is coloured ... Maybe because most of the black people they use ... they go to the sangomas.<sup>3</sup> I think they always say that these things of the inyanga<sup>4</sup> they attract one another. (SHT 3, Interview 23 April 2015)

Thus, the current study corroborates the study by Van der Watt and Ovens (2012) who expound on the intimate knowledge that Nigerian traffickers have of so-called 'push and pull' factors and cultures embedded in the local context. In one juju-related case, a Hawks investigator (SAPS 5, Interview 15 April 2015) stated that Nigerian traffickers were working with local black South African males. During the trafficking process the victim was told by traffickers 'you are coming from the Eastern Cape ... you must know what we are doing to you ... the cutting and things'. Referring to South Africa's 'culture of sangomas', a shelter manager mentioned a South African victim who was controlled by Nigerian traffickers. The victim spoke of a 'tradition' that was performed on her and other girls that were trafficked. According to SHT 5 (Interview 13 May 2015), the victim was given a wig by a *sangoma* after the rituals, and she also had all the ritual strings in her hair. Dunkerley (Expert interview 5 November 2015) asserted that Nigerian traffickers who use juju are clever and innovative and know exactly how to deceive and manipulate 'without having to force' victims.

A sentiment shared by participants was the extent of challenges inherent to the multidisciplinary response to cases where juju was used as control mechanism

over victims of trafficking. Participants voiced 'prayer', 'deliverance', 'Christian counselling', the 'power of Jesus' and the burning of the victims' amulets as some of the interventions used to facilitate some form of 'freedom', breaking the 'spiritual bondage' and changing the 'mind-set'. It is important to acknowledge that victims are not a universal or homogenous group and individuals do experience coercion differently. Issues related to victims' agency, how they overcome this form of coercion, and the suitability and efficacy of interventions by practitioners were not apparent in the study and require further exploration. Ikeora (2016: 13) warns against the notion of 'brainwashing' as an oft-used explanation by practitioners in regard to the juju, oath-taking and human trafficking nexus as it 'undermines the ability to bring forth the dilemma into mainstream anti-trafficking discourse'. One participant referred to 'evil spiritual powers' associated with the use of juju and asserts that juju is 'something that the western mind-set really struggles to understand' (SHT 6, Interview 13 May 2015). Another participant highlighted the importance of a paradigm shift when responding to the realities of the supernatural and the concomitant lived experiences of victims. Reflecting on his own meaning-making journey with juju, he highlighted that although 'the airy-fairy stuff' is not in his nature, he had to come to the realisation that 'there was definitely something and it was an awakening' (SHT 2, Interview 15 April 2015). Others warned that failing to understand evidence on juju-related control presented in court, may have far-reaching implications and compound the prospects for successful prosecutions. A Hawks investigator (SAPS 1, Interview 9 April 2015) undertook to raise awareness about juju amongst prosecutors as she argued that 'we should be ready' when cases eventually start to emerge for prosecution purposes. The need to acknowledge these lived realities as well as a call for an appropriate response were voiced as follows:

It is a huge reality and since the victims themselves have opened up to say that this is our fear, this is what we have experienced, I think we must pay attention to it because at the end of the day the victim is our authority. They're the ones we're trying to rescue; they're the ones that are feeling it, not us. (NGO 4, Interview 13 May 2015)

On 9 August 2015, South Africa's first comprehensive counter-trafficking law, namely, the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (No. 7 of 2013), came into operation (RSA 2015: 4),<sup>5</sup> which now equips practitioners for a deliberate response to a complex and subversive crime. Still, convictions of Nigerian perpetrators who are responsible for trafficking female victims to South Africa and also within the country for sexual exploitation, remain negligible (US Department of State 2016: 290, 341). Therefore, increased awareness of juju as a psychological method of control over victims of trafficking is imperative and merits further empirical research. An in-depth reconfiguration of the current counter-trafficking response should also be considered. This may include increased sensitivity to the lived experiences and psychosocial complexities highlighted in the article, with concomitant considerations of how such incidents will be dealt with from crime scene to court and beyond. Comprehensive

screening of victims of trafficking remains important and practitioners should guard against a 'juju conclusion' without a contextual appreciation of the constituent elements highlighted in this article. This becomes increasingly important as the juju method of control encumbers protection, prosecution and prevention of human trafficking due to the limited knowledge of law enforcement authorities and counter-trafficking practitioners (Ikeora 2016: 2). Human trafficking 'continue[s] to capture the imagination of the global public' (Goździak 2015: 23) and heed should be taken against sensationalistic representations of the juju and human trafficking nexus which could be considered predisposed to such narratives. As a complex social problem that 'crosses so many disciplinary ... boundaries', appropriately responding to human trafficking necessitates the incorporation of a range of perspectives emerging from more than one discipline (Laczko 2007: 42). Such perspectives may also infuse new approaches that are sensitive to the complexities emerging from juju and human trafficking (Ikeora 2016: 15).

## CONCLUSION

Studies related to the use of juju as a control mechanism over victims by Nigerian traffickers operating in and between Nigeria and European countries are steadily gaining momentum. The contribution of the current study is that the juju-related experiences shared by 23 participants revealed that the use of juju as a control method by Nigerian traffickers is also a subversive reality in South Africa. This reality poses significant challenges for an efficient counter-trafficking response. The chief limitation of the article is that the participant experiences related to juju emerged from an on-going PhD study which focussed on the broader investigation into human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Therefore, the data was not obtained from participants for the sole purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of the scope, nature and extent of the use of juju in the perpetration of human trafficking. The study does, however, oblige the South African and international counter-trafficking community to acknowledge these lived realities while considering intersecting aspects such as culture, embedded belief systems and structural societal vulnerabilities in formulating a response. This may require the incorporation of disciplines and perspectives from African Traditional Religion (Ikeora 2016) and sociology (Moloney 2015) that are, at least in the South African context, absent in current strategies to combat human trafficking and which could serve to fill the current knowledge lacuna related to juju. It was beyond the scope of the current article to address specific dynamics and response considerations related to prevention, victim identification and psychosocial service provision, investigation and prosecution where juju was used in the perpetration of human trafficking. Future research should hone in on these aspects and the possibility that the juju control mechanism may also be used for other forms of human trafficking, such as labour trafficking. Such knowledge develops gradually and sometimes slowly (Di Nicola 2007: 49) but is fundamental to the understanding of human trafficking as a complex phenomenon that is in a constant

state of flux and adaptability by criminals who conjure up new tools to subvert and circumvent efforts by law enforcement (Bjelopera and Finklea 2011: 1, 11; UNODC 2006: ix) and the broader counter-trafficking community.

## NOTES

1. The primary author first came to know about the term 'juju' in 2002 whilst working as a member of the South African Police Service. Amulets were often found in possession of victims, Nigerian pimps and traffickers, whilst unidentified concoctions, containing amongst others animal blood and tissue, were found at their residences. The conventional understanding was that juju was to Nigerian nationals like 'muti' was to local South Africans.
2. The meaning of the concept 'witchcraft' is fraught with nuances and complexities. The concept is from European origin and refers to persons who are believed to have 'the ability to manipulate supernatural forces with evil intent' (SALRC 2016: 21). Colonists conflated the Eurocentric understanding of 'witchcraft' with African indigenous beliefs in the supernatural (SALRC 2016: 23–24). Terminology confusion and conceptualisation problems emerge when concepts with European meanings are applied to seemingly related phenomena or practices in different African contexts. Unlike the Eurocentric meaning of 'witchcraft', practitioners in African societies use magic or supernatural powers for either evil or beneficial purposes. Varying interpretations of terms, such as 'witchcraft', 'sorcery', 'juju' or 'voodoo' in African contexts, therefore obstruct a deep understanding of these concepts in differing cultural settings.
3. A *sangoma* is an African traditional healer who calls on the spiritual guidance of an ancestral agency (Wreford 2005: 2).
4. An *inyanga* (*isinyanga*) is a herbalist who trains and garners knowledge from parents, grandparents and other professionals (Wreford 2005: 8).
5. Regrettably, the protection and assistance measures concerning foreign victims of trafficking in the Act have not come into operation yet – see the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (No. 7 of 2013).

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