

# Review of: "Is It Real? The Construction of Prejudice Against Nigerian Immigrants in Italy: A Case Study"

Dr Suleman Lazarus<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

## Solid Foundations

The manuscript is based on three primary solid data sources: the indictment from the Bologna Court, local online newspapers, and an interview with the solicitor of one of the defendants.

## Discriminatory Attitudes in Italian Public Opinion

The author rightly highlights the development of a strong discriminatory attitude in Italian public opinion against the Nigerian community. This prejudice stems from the stereotype that Nigerians are predominantly involved in the illegal sex industry. Moral entrepreneurs, including politicians, charity activists, and some scholars, perpetuate this narrative by portraying Nigerian women either as victims of smugglers in their native country and Italy or as individuals lured by easy financial gains. Additionally, there is a widespread assumption that these women adhere to "primitive" beliefs and rituals, such as Juju.

## Interconnection of Crime and Spirituality

The manuscript appropriately points out that various crimes and spiritual or supernatural connotations are interconnected, shedding light on the complexity of these rituals. These practices, far from being merely primitive, are significant aspects of Nigerian culture. Many criminologists remain skeptical and have yet to fully recognize the importance of the Traditional African Spiritual System, not only in Nigeria but across African diasporic communities worldwide.

## Social Construction and Stigmatization

The work offers a compelling interpretation of how certain actors contribute to problematizing issues, thereby creating indignation and provoking public reaction. This dynamic illustrates how the stigmatization of the Nigerian community in Italy is a socially constructed phenomenon. The article presents a judicial case study to demonstrate how these social constructions lead to the stigmatization of an entire social group.

## Goffman's Theory of Stigma

According to Goffman's (1963) original formulation, stigma is a social identity constructed around an individual associated with a discredited social status. A stigmatized person is therefore perceived as deviant, flawed, or spoiled by society. While Goffman's definitions are predominantly social and psychological, this research also considers stigmatization a discursive process. Through this process, individuals construct different identities using discursive resources (e.g., interpretative repertoires) to manage various narratives surrounding immigration and crime.

### Drawing Parallels with Internet Scammers (Yahoo Boys)

A critical issue is whether the manuscript should draw parallels between Nigerian women's involvement in prostitution and the activities of Nigerian men who engage in various Internet scams (also known as "Yahoo Boys" in many discourses). Both activities represent significant layers of organized transnational crime with far-reaching global consequences, tarnishing the reputation of Nigerians worldwide. See relevant studies on Nigerian internet scammers, also known as Yahoo Boys: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.04.009> and <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2016.07.002>. The manuscript could benefit from acknowledging the shared stigma and negative perception faced by Nigerians abroad and within their homeland. For example, the criminal actions of Yahoo Boys mirror the corrupt practices of politicians at all levels, from local councillors to the president, as discussed in <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e11142>. Moreover, (1) like the prostitution discussed in the paper, internet scams are often intertwined with Juju magic, as seen in <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030146>. (2) As with the case of prostitution reported in the paper, internet scammers are linked to the Black Axe gang, as demonstrated in this study: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2024.2352049>. Similar to the perception of prostitutes originating from the southern parts of Nigeria, public opinion suggests that internet scammers are more commonly found among southern youth compared to their northern counterparts, as demonstrated in this study on the North-South Divide: <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2021.0332>

### Complement and Support Old Citations

The authors should consider supplementing older citations, such as "Campani (2000)," on topics like the "Black Axe confraternity" and "Nigerian sex workers," with more recent research. Relevant newer works include Cohen (2023) on the Nigerian mafia and sex workers, and Lazarus (2024) on the Black Axe and the tarnishing of Nigeria's image.

### References:

- Cohen, C. (2023). The "Nigerian mafia" feedback loop: European police, global media and Nigerian civil society: Trends in organised crime. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 26(4), 340-357. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-022-09471-0>
- Lazarus, S. (2024). Cybercriminal Networks and Operational Dynamics of Business Email Compromise (BEC) Scammers: Insights from the "Black Axe" Confraternity. *Deviant Behavior*, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2024.2352049>

### Update Old Citations on Immigration and Crime Linkages

The author stated: "Immigration is associated with crime" (Barbagli, 1998). This citation from 1998 should be supplemented with recent works by scholars such as Professor Coretta Phillips and Professor Ben Bowling to provide a

more current perspective on the association between immigration and crime.

### **Provide Page Numbers for Direct Quotes**

The manuscript includes a direct quote: “the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, defines human trafficking...” from The Palermo Protocol (2000). Since this is a direct quotation, a specific page number should be provided for accuracy and proper attribution.

### **Accurate Citations for Multiple Authors**

The author mentioned: “Some authors (Dempsey, 2017) hold on to the definition provided by the Protocol...” but only cited one author. The phrase “some authors” suggests multiple scholars; therefore, additional references should be included to accurately represent the plurality of views.

### **Include Recent Evidence**

The manuscript states: “Empirical research (Serie et al., 2018) refutes the idea of human trafficking as an activity organised by criminal groups through the deception of migrants.” Recent evidence, such as: [a] <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2024.2353015> [b] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.108133>, and [c] the "Pig Butchering and Human Trafficking Twist" section of <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeconc.2024.100052>, supports the notion that human trafficking is indeed organized by criminal groups through the deception of victims, especially in cybercrime activities in Asia.

### **Citizenship and Skin Colour**

The author correctly notes: “Migration appears like a wound (Kristeva, 1987) that the obtainment of a legal status, that of citizens, by VM and IM cannot heal. The ‘State thought’ (Sayad, 1996), that is, all the discourses, mechanisms, and practices elaborated by the state administration to define, uniformize, and categorise a social group and to deal with it accordingly, is at play in this case. The Italian state apparatuses have drawn on a prejudice against the Nigerian community that was turned into a policy of active discrimination towards those individuals whose roots can be traced back to the West African country.”

It would be beneficial for the author to engage with additional works on citizenship, skin colour, and racialization, such as the study found at <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws8030014>, which discusses: “All ‘animals’ may be equal in principle, whereas, in practice, their ‘race’ serves as a critical source of social (dis)advantage in the ‘animal kingdom’. Thus, since citizenship is a precondition for possessing certain rights that non-citizens are not granted, I argue that citizenship cannot only be judged by whom it, in theory, excludes (i.e., non-citizens), but also by how it treats the included (i.e., citizens) on the basis of their ‘race.’”