



Voice of Freedom

Photography by women
who have escaped slavery

Featuring the work of ten women from Nigeria who were trafficked
through Libya to Italy.

Their words, their pictures, at Polo del '900.

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Introduction

Voice of Freedom works with women who have been trafficked, bringing the voices of the formerly enslaved to a wide public for the first time. Our latest project took place in November 2017 at the Piam Onlus shelter in Asti with women who had been trafficked from Nigeria, through Libya, into Italy.

We ran a two-week participatory photography program at the shelter, out of which emerged an extraordinary body of work, made by the women themselves. Each woman created a personal project, on themes she developed in the workshops – it is work from these that you see in this book, and which was exhibited at the Polo del '900 cultural centre, Turin, in June 2018.

These young Nigerian women had been tricked into slavery, or kidnapped, then trafficked to Libya where they were raped and assaulted, imprisoned in unendurably harsh conditions, or held captive in brothels and forced to work as prostitutes. From Libya they were trafficked across the Mediterranean to Italy, in fragile, overcrowded boats, which often sank.

Many were rescued from the water after witnessing the drowning of their friends.

In Italy, they were met by traffickers, held captive without documents and often forced to work as prostitutes until they managed to escape.

Human trafficking has become a €5bn-a-year business, money made by exploiting some of the most vulnerable people in the world. It is vitally important to inform the public about the roots and consequences of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

These women, with no formal experience of photography, came to create rich expressive work, using art to convey the emotional impact of slavery. Their photographs and words speak to an experience suffered by millions of unheard victims across the world. The work advocates for change with an authentic voice, one that deserves to be central to any discussion of modern-day slavery – that of the survivor herself.

Leila Segal, project director

Participatory photography

The **Voice of Freedom** project works within the discipline of participatory photography – a recognised tool for advocacy and social activism. A facilitator works with the group, teaching them to use a camera so they can define, communicate and improve their situation.

This makes powerful material that we show, with the women's consent, in exhibitions to raise awareness of trafficking. The material is unique in that it is the women themselves who are telling the stories. They own all the rights to their photographs.

Work by women in our earlier workshops has been used widely in campaigning, including at Amnesty International in London, and by Anti-Slavery International to support their victim protection campaign.

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Sometimes we don't pay attention to how people feel, we don't listen – but they want to tell you. This project really encouraged and inspired me. In the prison [in Libya], I tried to make use of the little I had – I never dreamed that I would be here speaking my mind, passing a message to others.'

Okungbowa Osamude

The photographers

Omo Colis, 18, lost both her parents and had to support herself and her little brother through farming. She was sold into slavery by a man who had promised to help her. On her a first crossing to Italy, the boat sank and she was washed back to shore in Libya after witnessing friends drowning. She says: 'I learnt a lot on this project. Before, I don't know how to snap – I don't even know how to define a picture. If I see a picture now, I will know how to define it.'

Emmanuel Joyce, 24, grew up on a farm in Edo State. After her sister was burned in a fire and her father died, she was sold in Mali by an aunt, escaping to make the crossing to Europe. 'My boat was on the water for 11 hours,' she says. 'There was one little boat that saw us. That was Italians. They ask who drove us, we say we don't have anybody, it is water who push us. They say we should hold on, they are going to call the big rescue ship.' Of the project, she says: 'I feel so happy about the pictures – it's my first time of snapping. I really like it. I'm opportuned to be in the Voice of Freedom group. There are some pictures that touch my heart.'

Sarah Oluwatimileyin, 31, is from Ogun State, Nigeria, where she trained to be an auxiliary nurse. She was told that she was going to work as a house help for a family in Libya – 'But when I got there, the story just changed all over.' Of the project, she says: 'It taught me about how I can preserve myself through pictures, and how I can speak to the world through pictures.'

Okunghowa Osamude, 25, is from Benin, Nigeria. 'All my pictures are about paying attention to things and people that are ignored,' she says. 'Sometimes we don't pay attention to how people feel, we don't listen – but they want to tell you. This project really encouraged and inspired me. In the prison [in Libya], I tried to make use of the little I had – I never dreamed that I would be here speaking my mind, passing a message to others.'

Efe Bella, 22, is from Delta State, Nigeria. She left high school to help support her family, and now hopes to complete her education and become an accountant. 'The project made me feel like we are important to the world and that we matter,' she says. 'I see the photos as a way to change how the world thinks about us. Many people think we are bad, but with these photos they will see who we really are.'

Tessy Gold, 20, is from Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. 'My language is Ibibio and not many people speak it here,' she says. 'A lot of people go through hell but I just want them to know that things turn around. They should not look down on themselves, they should not give up. Me, my dream is to become an actress, and you need to be creative for that. The photography course really helped me because now I am more creative than before.'

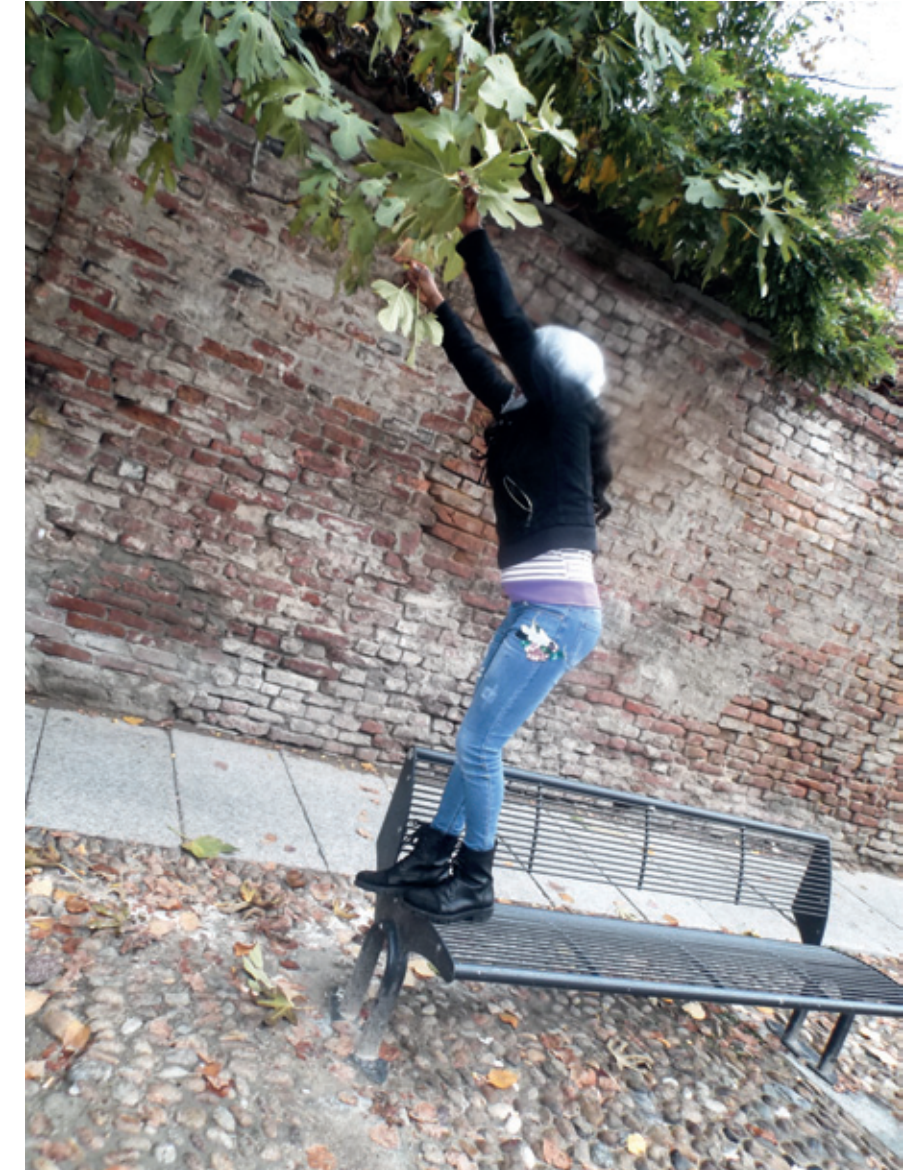
Gloria, 20, is from Benin City, Nigeria, where she worked as a pharmacist's assistant. It is her dream to become a doctor so that she can provide healthcare to people back home. 'Sharing the stories through my pictures is a joy to me,' she says. 'The project has had a great impact on us. Maybe it will educate people, make them understand the difficulties of leaving home and going outside their country.'

Unity Jay, 22, is from Uromi, Nigeria. 'Someone will come from Europe and go to Nigeria, they will see two beautiful girls and say "we have good job in Europe and we want your daughter to get the job". And the parents they don't have money, they don't know. It's not their fault.' Of the project, she says: 'I didn't know how to snap picture before but now I can snap very well. If our pictures can go outside to help others, then we will have used our time well.'

Greatness, 24, is from Benin City. She was told that she was travelling from Nigeria to Europe for a job using her artistic handiwork – 'Lybia was never my destination.' About the project, she says: 'I didn't know how to use a camera before. It's good that people who don't know me before can know me through my pictures, and can change through my story. I learn from them, so they can also learn from me.'

Stef, 19, is from Delta State, Nigeria. She is one of nine children. She helped to support her family by styling hair. A woman promised her a job in a hair salon in France, and then trafficked her through Libya, where she was imprisoned, then trafficked to Italy. Stef wants to become an anti-trafficking advocate, helping prevent other young people in Nigeria from falling prey to traffickers, and speaking out about the poverty and inequality that make so many vulnerable to it in the first place.

Omo Colis



Back in Nigeria anytime I wanted to pluck mango, this is how I pluck it. I had a farm from when I was 13 years old. My grandmother gave me the land because no money to go to school, so they give me the land. I cleared the land, plant cassava, mango. I went there to harvest it then I sell it and get some money so I will take care of my brother, pay for his school fees. That is why I hold this tree. Anytime I see this picture then I will remember.

The land was far. Every month I clear the farm. Without clearing, all those things will not grow. If I didn't have anything to do at home I would go to the farm. I use cassava to make fufu or fry gari, then I do palm oil. So from there we sold them.

After that, there is not a lot of money. If I plant fruit nothing will go well. A man came to help me, so that I can go to school and a lot of things. From there he took me, this person I didn't even know that he want to sell me at Libya. Then he sell me, then another person sell me. That is how they sell me, sell me, sell me.

Omo Colis



I took this picture with this shoe because this sand is like a desert, and if police inside the desert stop us, this is how their shoe look like.

So this sand is form of desert. Then this two shoe it looks like all those men.

If they ask you money you don't have, they will rob you, rape you.

Omo Colis



What happened to me is that the boat capsized. All of us were crying 'help', there is no help. Nothing, nothing. The boat just capsized and everybody began to swim, and me I don't know how to swim, so I just surprised I escaped from that death. I'm just shock.

I don't even know how I leave that sea.

I remember a time I wanted to jump inside the sea, because I reason, if the boat capsize everybody's going to die, so before that let me just die first. Then my friends they said no, I should don't do that, I should wait until the boat capsize, everybody will die together at once.

Then from there, there was arguments, fighting. One Somali burst the lapa lapa [punctured the inflatable boat] – not accident. I don't even know why he's so angry.

The boat is under the sea. We are 150, so that is why. Nobody to rescue, nobody. The water pushed me to dry land, Libya.

Omo Colis



This is how a lot of women suffer in my community. Nobody to help, nothing nothing. That is why I take this picture. Old women, nobody to encourage them, they are lonely.

Omo Colis



They are showing love to each other because the Bible tell us to love your neighbour as yourself.

We humans, our bodies are the same but our hearts is not the same.

Omo Colis



I had the idea for this picture because this is the first time I see a river like this.
I was scared, I was afraid to near the water, then I make up my mind: 'No, this
is free world.'

Omo Colis

Emmanuel Joyce



Many people use this to iron clothes. But there is another thing they use the iron for.

Most of the madames that brought girls to Europe use the same iron to maltreat people. They use it when the girls refuse to pay the money. They will plug the iron and put it on her body.

Even a friend of mine, she showed me her back where her madame plugged the iron and press it on her. It is very bad for a human being to use an iron that is plugged, to put it on someone's body, all in the name of money.

Emmanuel Joyce



I took this picture for two reasons. The first reason is, when I was in Libya, when we were in ghetto, we slept like this. No fresh air, nothing nothing. Some people even died there. And the second reason why I took this picture is, this is how people died in the boat while crossing to Europe.

Emmanuel Joyce



I took this picture when I wake up in the morning. Each time I wake up, I open the window, tidying everywhere. In Nigeria we don't have curtain, we don't have windows like this – we have iron window, and even if you want to look outside, you can't. You can only peep.

This is the ninth floor. Where I live in village is just ordinary house, there is no step.

I took it to remember my background. There is even those houses at the back. In our village there are only bushes around.

Emmanuel Joyce

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



In Nigeria, there is a being called Oro, which women are not permitted to see. Even if you peep out of the window they will know. They will go to the house and bring the woman out of the house and kill her, sometimes this include me too.

We are not allowed to see the Oro because it's naked and it's an abomination. If a woman is peeping, they will scent it. They will come to the house and ask for the woman. Due to spiritual things, they will know her name, they will bring her out and they will kill her.

Whenever Oro comes, even if we are sleeping, we shake in our bed.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



This is an engagement ring. If you get this level of marriage in my tribe it's a very good thing. It's what I still wish for very much. If you are able to do this, it means you are a great child. It's called Yoruba marriage – this is my tribe.

In this picture the fingers are not equal. Due to my thoughts inside of me, had the fingers been equal I would have loved it.

I wish I could get this ring before I left Nigeria, but I couldn't, because my thinking and my boyfriend's thinking, it's not the same. That's why I said fingers are not equal.

I wouldn't have think of anything like Europe because when I'm with him I'm always comfortable. But due to his attitude, his character, I just have to leave. He keeps hurting my feelings, so I just have to move ahead. I didn't tell him, I just leave. It was when I got here I call him. He doesn't know what I was doing then [in Libya], he doesn't know.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



I love this picture because whenever I look at her personally I look at her as my childhood friend. There is a friend like that, not she, but they look alike so much. We were brought up together, her name is Dami. The church I attend, her dad is the owner of the church, my dad is the second in charge of the church and that was how they brought us together since two years old.

Later, her mum and dad broke up and her mum left, so her dad married another wife who started maltreating them. Suddenly Dami just got missed – they were like, 'Dami has travelled, travelled to abroad,' – this and that.

Meanwhile, later we find out that they took her to one village for slavery – her dad sold her. There was no money, that is why they sold the girl.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



It's a gift from my friend at Libya, this trouser. It makes me remember the girl and the journey of the road. I brought it all the way from Libya to this country, so whenever I set my eyes on this trouser, I remember everything.

I spread it on my bed – this is my blanket – and I snap the picture.

My madame that took me to Libya maltreated me. She put in me in the connection house, she beat me. It was there that my friend gave me clothes. I didn't have clothes, I didn't have anything.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



I like this picture because it's my footstep. Another person match the foot, it will be scattered – so this is *me*.

In Libya, in the connection house, we were prostitutes. I have no choice. It's rape, it's not from my mind. My madame took all the money. I only went out once – still the prostitution. It's in a man's house, because the price they pay is less when they come, but if we go to their house the money is high. Very dangerous.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin



I took this picture because I was not oportuned, when I was in my country, to dress like this. The glasses doesn't have shade, and whenever you see glass with no shade... They used to call people like this 'gangsta'. I just use it for this reason – for fun.

I am happy to see myself living gold – able to put on whatever I want. Now I am free. I can do anything I like – anything good. The pains I passed through, I am recovering. If I should pass through that stress, that pain, and things are still not okay, it would be very hard.

Sarah Oluwatimileyin

Okungbowa Osamude



My bag fell down and when I picked it up I realised that this place symbolised something. So many things have been neglected, set aside. Until we take note of them, we don't know how important they might be.

This gutter is covered, which makes it comfortable for the students to walk to school. It's covered because of the economy in Europe.

In Nigeria, some people don't have gutters, never mind about covering them. Sometimes when it rains, a flood starts from the gutter, causing sickness and untimely death, especially to the children. You see students holding their shoes – they have to look for transport to school, because they can't walk.

Okungbowa Osamude



That wall reminds me of those days when we were in Libya, the prison, how we can't escape. We have to see the brightness of the sun through a hole, and even money cannot pass through that hole. It's under the gate and the men give us biscuits, just something that will sustain us for the day.

I told you how I was trafficked, how I was kidnapped. They were asking for ransom, a huge ransom. It was more than the money that we bring.

The emotion of the building, the way that I took the picture, it shows that it's a prison where people have been trapped. No food, nothing. It's really important, it's one of my favourites.

Okungbowa Osamude



I want to tell my people at home that this is what Europe looks like. The roads are lonely, they are not filled with crowds. In my country we don't have this kind of quiet, lonely road. There is a car parked, but nobody around.

In Nigeria you feel lively, you feel fun, you feel welcome. You have so many things to talk about. Before you leave your house you hear noises, you hear news of what is going on outside.

I miss that. Here they'll tell you 'shh shh, talk quiet, you're loud, you're lousy, just be calm'. I like my culture because they're so lousy. When I say 'lousy' I mean 'loud' – that's what lousy means.

Okungbowa Osamude



This tree is so beautiful – the colour, the emotion. I don't want anything more in the world – just something natural and beautiful like this.

I don't want a tree with black, white, green... just something that has one colour, and looks elegant. When we come to Europe we all become one like this, but when we are in Nigeria we have so many colours, so many branches, so many differences.

In Europe we all have to adapt to the system, speak one language, do one thing at the same time. It's good, it helps the brain to work well.

Okungbowa Osamude



This picture is showing I'm surrendering myself to the Italian government, like I need help. My country is dying of hunger, bad economy, so I am opportune to be here. I am alive, I am safe – please just help me. Help me in any way you can. Take me as a child, as a sister, as a friend – I am yours.

Okungbowa Osamude

Efe Bella



In Nigeria we sell water. This is what I put on my head. Back in Nigeria it's not actually like this – we look sad, we look dirty. I do some menial jobs to help myself, to also help my mother. I sell the water for 5 naira.

In Nigeria the weather is always hot so we put water in the fridge to make it cold, very cold. Then we put it on our head. We go to the park, to the street, to every place to sell.

This picture also signifies suffering because the time you are supposed to go to school is the time you are selling. They are suffering in Nigeria. Big suffering. It's poverty.

Efe Bella



This picture reminds me of the journey, when we were about to enter the desert. When they put us in the hilos [truck], that's how we sat. I saw them start arranging people and I was afraid.

Even on top of the sea, this is how I sat, and I cried throughout. Almost 12 hours in the boat. We are more than hundred. We can't see the sea because girls have to sit in the bottom of the boat.

I sit like this whenever I am depressed. My dream is to become an accountant but because of the situation we are in now, we can't easily access education. If you want to go to university you need resources, back-up, connections. But you just turn out to be – black.

Efe Bella



When I saw this waterfall, I thought, where is this water coming from? Where is it going to? Human beings all came from somewhere, and we all have somewhere we are going. Everybody has a source.

The water is drinkable, natural. This water is clean. The water is actually coming out of rock. It can not dry up – so my hope can not die.

Efe Bella



In my village, we have a river to catch fish. The fish can't survive out of the water.
Water is the source of life.

Water can save, and water can kill. If I had fallen inside the sea on my journey,
I wouldn't have survived. Sea water contains salt, you can't drink it – so even
if you can swim, you won't survive.

Efe Bella



Back in Nigeria we didn't have a cooker like this. We cooked with firewood,
we had to enter the bush and cut it to make the fire. We sat on the floor.

In the old days, we believed that a woman's education ended in the kitchen.
No matter how educated you are, you still get married and become a housewife.
But I don't want to be dependent on any man. I want to have my own business,
get anything I want from my own pocket, make my own decisions.

I don't want my own children to suffer the way I suffered. I want to have enough
money to make adequate preparations, give them best education, provide for
them.

Efe Bella

Tessy Gold



This picture reminds me of my parents' house that was sold. It was a beautiful house, fenced around, and there was gate. My parents were rich when they were alive, then I lost them and everything was messed up.

Both my parents died in a motor accident when I was 13 years old. My uncle came to the city to claim the house, because in Nigeria women do not have any power in buying property like land or house.

Then it was just I and my junior brother. He was too small to react over the house. Me that was a little bit grown, I couldn't do anything because I'm a girl. They took us back to the village to stay with grandmum, and I couldn't further my education any more.

My auntie came and she said she wanted to take me to the city to live with her. My grandmum told me to go and I was still crying.

Tessy Gold



This really tells about when I went to live with my auntie. It reminds me of how she maltreated me. I used to feel sad and think about my parents. I was really okay with them, they do everything to make me happy but my auntie she always beats and torments me.

Back then, in the city, she woke me up by 5 o'clock to clean the house, to cook, look after her kid – everything. She treat me like a slave, because she is not my biological mum.

One day, she threw out my bags and told me to leave the house.

Tessy Gold



When I got home, things were worse. We hardly eat. My grandmum she was stress out. She would be crying, thinking, 'where can I get food for you people?'

We planted things on the farm. That is how we survived. The neighbourhood people would pay me to pluck coconut.

This picture shows me coming back from the farm. At times I used to go on the street hawking orange.

Tessy Gold



My grandmum came up with this idea that there is a lady in France that is our family member, but I didn't grow up to meet the lady. The lady said she want to come and take me from Nigeria to Europe so she can help me further my education – I can continue from where I stop. Hearing that, I was happy because I would be able to take care of my junior brother – he is the only family I have left. So I told my grandmum okay.

She told me to get ready, then took me to a park where we can enter bus. And that's how I got to Benin. From there, a man took me with some other people that were going to Italy. From bus the man change us to hilos [truck], and that's how I got to Libya.

I spent a long time in Libya. They put me in a house. The house was fence around. The ladies there were not allowed to come out.

Tessy Gold



In the boat they put 140 people and it's risky, everywhere is tight.

Everywhere was bright, and in this water you can not stay in the middle and see the end. You are not seeing anything like tree. We were somehow scared, someone like me. I was 'oh God please don't let me die.' I was just crying. People were praying, they were crying.

The water is very big. I've never seen water like that before. The lapa lapa [boat] would be jumping up and down, so if the person that is driving is not that strong, probably the boat might capsize.

I was the only lady on the lapa lapa, it was filled with guys. We left Libya by 11pm and got to Italy the following day at 6am. That 6am, when the rescue ship came.

Tessy Gold



Any time I took first position in school, my parents would cook like this for me, and they would ask me to eat all the meat alone, not give any to my junior brother. This picture reminds me of my parents, how we used to live as one family.

If somebody should go to anybody in Africa, and say, 'I want to take you to Italy so that I can change your life', you have to really study the person, and the kind of work she is doing in Europe. You have to really ask questions. Who is this person? Where are they taking you to?

Don't allow even your mum or your dad to push you into this because you are the one that will face the consequences, not your family. My advice is, be careful with your life, and be contented with what you have.

Tessy Gold

Gloria



Many of us, and almost all of us, have passed through too many temptations in life, too many struggles and trials – the trip here, how difficult it is. Libya is hell... the sun... we are in prison. But being out of Libya is to testify that now we are free. So I took this picture as a bond of consolation. We were trafficked and the anti-traffickers are giving us the hope that they are going to deal with these issues.

Gloria



I knew this fruit in Libya. It's very sweet – not that I like it much, but the Arab people who put us inside the boat gave it to us. We didn't have the mind of saying 'let's eat', they just dropped it there.

I was really afraid – the big sea. It's not like the desert, where even though you are packed inside the hilos [truck], maybe after driving for 18 hours they can stop and everybody will come down and stretch their legs.

In the sea, before we were rescued, there was no reflection of any tree or birds, no reflection of anything at all. You can not see the ending of the sea – where you are coming from, where you are going to.

Gloria



As you can see in the picture, there are three main objects: the school bag, the working shoes, and the currency.

I put the money first because there should be enough money in Nigeria to put me in school, but it's really scarce.

The schoolbag, which represents education, I put at the back.

Then there are the shoes, which are working shoes – because of unemployment. Many people will leave school without a job. They will look everywhere but won't find one – for example, my elder brother. The shoes are working shoes, not sandals for school. For an office job it's the perfect shoe.

Gloria

Unity Jay



I took this picture because of my grandmother's village. We have a lot of images like this in the village and ever since I came to Europe I haven't seen them so much.

I don't know who made them but they made it with their hands, using clay – they are artists. It's a way to remember people who have passed away. They leave it outside so everyone will see and remember the person, that he was good.

Unity Jay



I snapped this picture because when they were eating it was like people who were in a prison, in particular where someone from Italy brought them. They are suffering inside the house, can't come out.

They are in a prison inside a room. No freedom. You can see she's using her own hand to eat, no spoon. They don't have good care.

Unity Jay



I took this picture like someone who is in darkness, just coming out. Like they have been in darkness for years, now they come out to see the light.

Unity Jay



Here we don't wash by hand, because we have washing machines. Back in Africa we don't have washing machines, you wash clothes with your hands. The girl in this picture was doing it, and I remember this is how we used to wash clothes back then – even when you are tired you keep on washing.

Unity Jay



I make these wigs because most people like them. It's kind of cold, they like wearing a wig. It makes things easier – there's no need to sit down for five hours, six hours to make your hair. You can just put it on, you can just remove it. I love doing this work – I started when I was small.

In a week I make maybe two – this week I have to do five. Sometimes people tell me what they want, sometimes they don't tell me and I just use my idea to create the style for them.

Unity Jay



I love animals. Back in Nigeria I don't play with them, because most animals they are very very dangerous. But here I love to touch them and play with them.

Here I attend animal school – it's called 'Agricoltura'. I studied different types of animals, cows, pig, fowl – they told us how to train them. It's not just animals, it's farm work. We studied how they plant the rice. We even learned how to make latte – how to drum it out of cows. Here in Italy you can turn your hand to anything. One day I might have the opportunity to work in any of these things.

Unity Jay

Greatness



In desert there is no house. You can't see house in desert. We just sleep outside. Back then they would load us like 50, 20, in the hilos [truck]. There would not be space for you to turn or to even look. So anybody that fall down they are not going to wait, that person will just die there. We spent the nights on the sand, it was very very cold.

Back home in Nigeria, the sand is very good. There is no cold, not too hot. Very good. We do spread clothes on it, and sleep on it. We don't need to go inside because the sand will be okay.

Greatness



I think I was going to Europe, not Libya. Libya was never my destination. They said I'm going to use my artistic handiwork to work here in Europe. They said that whites don't normally do it – so it's the blacks who make cakes, decorations, marriage parties. They said, if I come here, I'm going to do that.

My trafficker was not a woman, it was a man. When he take me home, first day, he not said anything. Second day was when he said I should follow his sister to go to work, I said, 'I can't go to do decoration this night. I thought in Europe they don't do night party.' He say I'm going to see the work when I get there – it was another work.

For me, it's using my hands to work, not my body. So I said, 'this was not the agreement.'

Greatness



People that brought us, whatever they are saying, whether good or bad, we have to listen to them, because we don't have our parents here, so they are our parents.

The person who brought me, the second day he told me I have to go to work, I was not saying anything. I was just looking down because I can't look at him. He is my leader so I have to bow down my head and listen to him, without no sense of rights.

If you don't obey them they are going to kill you, or torture you in the house, and beat you up. There is nobody coming to ask, because government don't know you exist in this place.

Greatness



When I saw this flower, I saw my grandfather again. I remember him very well. He was the one who brought me up. I have a father but he did not care for us when we were little kids.

This flower is like the one planted in our house – my grandfather loved it so much. When I ask him, 'Why do you love the flower?' he said, 'Flower is just like a life. When you wet it, it grow, but when you don't wet it, it goes down. My child, very soon I will be leaving the world, so you have to wet your life with the word of God.'

Whenever I see this flower, I do see my grandfather. It make me remember what he taught us back then. This flower I do cherish it very well.

Greatness



Inside this bag there are shoes, children's clothes, adult clothes – many things inside. Just the little I can support my family. So this one, my family can sell it and have some money.

We call them, 'I have bag, come and take it'. We pay them. When it get to Nigeria, they will call my mum and say, 'come and take your load.' This bag is 100 euro. It's very very heavy – look at the size, very big.

It take a long time. Get home next month. My mother is going to call me that she received and everything inside is complete.

Greatness

Stef



The colour I'm wearing is black. It's a mourning colour. In the week I snapped this picture I was mourning my mum and up to now I'm still with the black. I promised I was never going to leave my family. I did everything I did because I have this heart, I want to help.

In this picture I'm looking forward, looking ahead at what I'm going to be. Let me enjoy everything I have suffered for. But my right hand is behind, reaching back for my family, people who need me.

Reaching back, there is nothing to touch, nothing to hold. It is very far. My hand is empty because I still have a lot to do. I want to say: 'Mummy don't worry, I'm going to buy you the best car.' It's so painful, reaching back for that woman I looked at and I smiled.

Stef



My mum had nine kids. She did up to 30 different jobs in one month. She became a bricklayer, she can go with wheelbarrows, pans, fresh water for people, all because she wants to feed her kids.

Yes, she had a husband, but my dad wasn't a caring type at all. He had six wives. We the children had to stay for two nights with maybe two cups of gari. We had to wait with our cup standing in the rain – it was the only way we could get clean water.

Stef



This is like a microphone. When you are inside saying something, somebody outside is going to hear it. It shows that when I say something, as an advocate, it's going to reach out to people who really need to know. It's a small object but it reaches far.

When I tell them, 'this is what really happened', wherever they are and no matter the distance, it has to reach those who really need to know.

I say, 'if you try to be me, you can lose your life, so it's better you stay in your house in Nigeria, find something tangible to do.'

When I tell them the stories, the dangers, I guess if not all, 60 per cent will want to change their mind from taking the same risk.

Stef



These are my shoes. One is rotten and the other is a little bit new. The picture signifies my feet, and my feet signify my journey – one behind and one ahead.

The one behind represents back then – Nigeria, Libya. It was so horrible, and that's why you see the rotten shoe, something that reminds me of so much pain.

The shoe at the front is life – this is my current stay in Europe. You understand, it's a step I have to take.

Stef

