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**A Fictional X-ray of the Contemporary Society: a Study of
Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked***

Nnyagu, Uche, Ph.D.

Department of English

Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe

Anambra State, Nigeria

&

Adunchezor, Ngozi, Ph.D.

Department of English

Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe

Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is one of the contemporary writers who strongly affirm that a true fiction must aptly mirror the world of the writer. This, she vividly demonstrates in her *Trafficked*. Adimora-Ezeigbo got her inspiration for the fiction from historical and contemporary facts. In our contemporary society, female trafficking is on the increase. Many unpatriotic citizens indulge in the illegal deal which they see as a very lucrative business. Unwary young women are lured into international sex trade with lots of tantalizing promises that would eventually turn to illusions. Trafficking is frowned at in Nigeria, yet people are perpetually trafficked. In this research work, the

researcher examines the novel in line with sociological approach so that the ills of human trafficking as it is a case in the contemporary society would be seen. The researcher believes that when the ills are exposed, there would be reformation.

Introduction

Trafficked is a story of Nneoma who gets disappointed with her fiancé, Ofofata for accepting the traditional role of *ozo nkwu*. Nneoma sees it as a barbaric tradition that should be abhorred in the modern society. She decides to estrange herself from him and consequently, she is trafficked to Italy from where she is resold to Baron who takes her to Europe to continue the sex trade in Europe. She escapes from Baron and consequently, is deported alongside other trafficked prostitutes. In Lagos, Nneoma and the other deported girls are taken to Oasis, a rehabilitation centre owned jointly by committed individuals with the assistance of the government. At Oasis, she learns sewing which she masters very well and is later employed to work as a seamstress in Asampete, a big firm in Lagos. However, she is later sacked when the managing director of Asampete discovers that she was a deported prostitute.

Juxtaposition of Fact and Imagination in Fiction

In writing *Trafficked*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo has subtly, like other master craftsmen, blended facts and imagination. The style, no doubt, enhances full appreciation of the work. So many instances abound in the novel where real facts, identifiable people and places in and outside Nigeria are used in the novel. It is a universally acknowledged fact that in the present Nigerian society, despite the clarion calls against child and female trafficking, people still indulge in such ill businesses. Women, especially young women of about fifteen and sixteen years old are perpetually smuggled out of the country. These young women are usually smuggled like contraband goods because they have no papers and other prerequisite requirements. Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly x-rays this in the novel.

It is a realistic fact that Nigerians prefer to remain slaves in foreign countries to coming back to Nigeria. This is why Nigerians who are deported prefer to remain in foreign prison to coming back to Nigeria. On daily basis, many Nigerians seek to leave the country to other foreign countries. It is none of their business, what they go to the foreign countries to do. The obvious fact remains that things are believed to be hard in Nigeria and graduates are not guaranteed of any job in the country. Many Nigerians therefore, aspire to leave the country to other foreign countries. Those who are already in foreign countries dread being deported. Adimora-Ezeigbo, makes the fact vivid when she writes:

.... Before they left Heathrow, the pilot had insisted that the immigration officers from the Home office remove two girls who were

crying and shouting that they didn't want to leave. One of them had bellowed, "I'd rather die than return to that country." (3)

Nigerians get smuggled to Britain via other countries' borders. In *Trafficked*, Nneoma, when interrogated, says, "I come to this country from Italy." She goes further to say that "I went to Italy with a woman who promised to help me and some other girls to get job. She said it was easy to get jobs there and that we could migrate to Britain after a while if we wanted." (15) The traffickers of course, are aware that what they do is illegal business and for security purposes, they prefer to go with nicknames instead of their real names. During the interrogation before being deported, Nneoma is asked. "What's the name of this 'madam' who took you to Italy?" She responds that "She was called Madam Dollar. I don't know if this is her real name, but that was what everyone called her." She also states that all she knows about the man who bought her from Madam Dollar and brought her to UK is Baron.

Use of Identifiable Locations as Fictional Setting

Like Adichie did in her two novels; *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*, Adimora-Ezeigbo has equally used identifiable places in Nigeria and Europe as the settings of the fictional work. Not only that she just mentions the locations, she has also so categorically, described the locations so that anybody who knows the places in real life knows immediately that the fictional settings are not different from the real locations. Perrine's assertion that literature draws its strength from actual life and that it deals with human life in all its complexities and difficulties are evident in Akachi Ezeigbo's vivid description of Lagos State of Nigeria. On page 25, her vivid description of Lagos is more realistic than imagined. She states that though Nneoma had not stayed in Lagos long enough before she left the country for Italy in 1998, she was sure that the spot where the bus made a brief stop was the famous Yaba bus-stop in Lagos Mainland. Her description of the daily activities in the identifiable location in the novel is apt. According to the novel, "The frantic energy of touts pursuing passengers and street traders chasing each vehicle that arrived and asking people to buy oranges, mangoes, bananas and pure water held Nneoma's attention for a while."

Prostitution, a Business for Edo girls

Nwaiwu (2011) maintains that Adimora-Ezeigbo's works are interesting because of her ability to knit life experiences into art. Adimora-Ezeigbo's style of knitting life experiences into art is made vivid in such a way that any reader can easily point out the realistic facts knitted into the fiction. It is a known fact for instance, that Edo girls mainly, are into prostitution and they are trafficked. Adimora-Ezeigbo fails to mince words in relaying this realistic fact. In doing this, she has decided to use identifiable figures in society as her fictional characters. On the day the trafficked girls arrive Nigeria, we hear one of the minor characters in the novel say, "shameless girls.

I hear they are Edo girls. I wonder what governor Lucky Igbinedion and his wife, Eki Igbinedion, think of all this.” It is through the minor characters in a work of art that certain facts about the main characters are made known by the author. With this statement of the minor character, Adimora-Ezeigbo x-rays a historical fact as well as goes further to educate the reader on who the past governor of Edo state was. The audience who didn’t know the name of the former governor’s wife is now educated by the author that she is Eki Igbinedion. The author goes further to preach to the governor when she says, “I think the governor and his wife ought to do more to stop human trafficking. They can start by reducing poverty in their state.”

The Case of *Sorting* in Nigerian Institutions

Extortion of money and other wealth from the students by the lecturers to award them unmerited grades is no longer news in many higher institutions in Nigeria, especially, in the Lagos State University which is the chief focus of the writer. In some occasions, female students are sexually harassed by the male lecturers. Nnyagu also aptly mirrors this social fact in his *Divine Deceit* and *Final Crises*. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo makes the fact very pathetic in her *Trafficked*. Ofomata, in order to appease Nneoma, has gone back to the university to acquire a university degree. In the university, he is always extorted by Komolafe, one of the ignominious lecturers in the university. Although Ofomata abhors the incessant extortion, he cannot do anything to help himself. He always obliged so that he would not be unjustly punished by the gullible lecturers symbolized in the novel by Komolafe. Some of the lecturers in the novel are inconsiderate about the high demands they make from the students. On page 32, of the novel, for instance, Komolafe says to Ofomata, “Can you get me some tires for my Volvo.” Also on page 106, the same lecturer, Komolafe again, says, “Ofomata, I have a request to make. Could you please, get me a jerrycan of fuel after our evening lecture? Consider this as an urgent request.”

State of Oil Products in Nigeria

According to Baldick (2004), literature enlarges one’s experience and understanding. Acute scarcity of petrol as mirrored in *Trafficked* is not a new thing in Nigeria. The plights the situation caused Nigerians in 1992 are enormous. Some institutions in Nigeria gave the students some days break pending when the situation would be arrested. Not only that fuel is always very scarce in Nigeria, the price also always escalates so that many people who cannot afford the high price if at all the product is available in any filling station, parked their vehicles. Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly mirrors this realistic fact in the novel in such a way that anybody reading the novel tends to have a reminiscence of the historical fact. Nnyagu equally mirrors this pathetic historical fact in his *To Unknown Destination*.

The Igbo View about Primogeniture

In many Igbo homes, especially where there is no money, the siblings may mutually agree to jointly build a house in the main compound to accommodate them. In most occasions, the younger ones, if they are wealthier, may single-handedly build the house. Soon after completion of the house, the first sons who may have contributed only a little or nothing at all, suddenly remembers that the compound belongs to him as the heir and he conspires with some diabolic elders of the kindred to send the younger ones out of the house jointly built. This realistic social fact, Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly mirrors with the invented characters Ezeozo and Ogukwe. Ogukwe, from his little salary as a junior civil servant in Enugu, has contributed immensely in the building of the family main house. The house when completed, Ezeozo suddenly remembers that as the first son, he has the right of primogeniture and so, has argued that the house belongs to him, as the firstborn so he forcefully occupies the house. Ogukwe and his family are consequently confined to the narrow, two-roomed hut in which his mother had lived until she died ten years after their father. Ogukwe's confrontation of his elder brother makes it apparent that he contributed greatly to the building of the house, thus "Ezeozo, my brother, why have you decided to claim the house two of us built as yours?" Ezeozo, as a matter of fact, does not deny that his brother did contribute in the building of the house. His argument is that Ogukwe is *odu nwa*, the lastborn and by tradition, should inherit their mother's hut instead. (43) This, equally, is a societal fact. Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the lastborn is to inherit his mother's property while firstborn has right over the father's main compound. But Ezeozo was aware of that when Ogukwe was contributing for the building of the house and his selfishness and greed could not permit him to remind Ogukwe in time about his right of primogeniture. However, among brothers who understand themselves, they continue living together peacefully pending when anyone of them has become rich enough to build his own house.

Charlatanism among Many Pastors in Our Contemporary Society

Today, people believe that church is one of the most lucrative businesses in Nigeria because of the gullibility of Nigerians who believe so much in miracles. People run from one church to another in a bid to seek miracles. Many young men and women thus become self-ordained pastors and therefore, the number of mushroom churches keeps increasing on daily basis. As the number of churches proliferate, so also do ills because the pastors abhor preaching repentance, rather, they only preach such things that would make their congregations to keep multiplying. How can they even preach repentance when many of them are perpetual visitors to witch doctors? Because all that our people long for is miracle, many pastors and prophets go extra miles to get themselves empowered to be able to perform miracles. We hear cases of pastors and prophets in our country today, who involve themselves in one dirty charm or the other

because they want to be able to always perform miracles. Some pastors, on regular basis are reported to have raped underage girls and when under severe interrogation, they reveal that they do so as to keep their charms active. This is a source of worry to many concerned Nigerians. Since it is believed that literature is the best means to fight ills, some writers decide to lampoon the charlatanism of pastors in their various works of art. Soyinka satirized such shams in his *Trials of Brother Jero*, Nnyagu lampoons them in *Open Secret*, Okoye, in *Behind the Clouds*. A popular Nigerian comic musician, Uche Ogbuagu equally ridiculed the rate to which fake churches multiply in the nation. This realistic fact is vividly blended into fiction by Adimora-Ezeigbo in her *Trafficked*. She writes, “Hannah, living with Prophet Elias without any bride price paid on her head; Hannah, joining the gang that destroyed the shrine of *arusi* Udo; Hannah, abandoning her parents and siblings and St. John Anglican Church where she was baptized, and running to the founder of a Satanic religion.” (44) As the plot of the novel unfolds, it is alleged that Prophet Elias and his followers cart away the *arusi* to sell it to the Europeans for their own selfish gains.

Historical Facts as Fiction

King Jaja of Opobo is a very popular historical figure who has been described by Adichie as a defiant king, defiant in the sense that he refused to be submissive to the European colonial masters. In the history of colonialism in Nigeria, King Jaja is always mentioned for his remarkable role; not selling his people to the colonizers. Like other similar heroes of the past like Zik of Africa, Jaja’s name is immortalized as many remarkable places in Nigeria are named after him. This historical fact is well pictured by Adimora-Ezeigbo in the below excerpt;

Jaja hall was the biggest male hall of residence on campus. It was named after Jaja of Opobo, who had presided over a prosperous kingdom in the Southern part of the country in the nineteenth century until the British colonial Administration dethroned him, sacked and looted his kingdom and deported him to West Indies, where he died in ignominy. (61)

Adimora-Ezeigbo’s account of the hero, King Jaja of Opobo is not different from Adichie’s. Having thus noticed that Jaja wasn’t docile, the Europeans exiled him to die in West Indies. One who reads the two novels and sees the similar illustrations of the fact, will, as the adage says that any snake seen by more than one eyes can no longer be regarded as a sacred python, be sure that the two artists have relayed a historical fact.

Adimora-Ezeigbo chronicles some popular Nigeria artists and their portfolios. Some of these artists are still living and popular in our contemporary society that whenever they are mentioned, even kids appraise them. One reading *Trafficked*, therefore, tends to appreciate it fully for it shares one’s own experiences. As a work of

imagination, Adimora-Ezeigbo has invented characters through whom we are made abreast of the historical figures. On page 61 of *Trafficked*, for instance, Adimora-Ezeigbo writes that Ugama looked round the room, which had two small beds and two lockers and reading tables, Ofomata's bed was neatly made but the other bed was untidy, the wall above it a collage of celebrities – from musical icons to Nollywood and soccer stars. Sunny Ade's face beamed beside Onyeka Onwenu's; Kalu Nwankwo rubbed shoulders with Austin Okocha; Saint Obi smiled at Genevive Nnaji.

As Eagleton observes that literature is a liberating force that frees us from the inherent shackles placed upon us by the society, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* attests to this. One state governor in Nigeria once described pensioners as deadwoods. As an activist, Adimora-Ezeigbo has subtly mirrored this realistic fact in her novel so that the pathetic experience of the pensioners can be seen and the people concerned can make amends. In x-raying the realistic fact, Adimora-Ezeigbo states that Ogukwe's pension has still not been paid; he has given up the hope of ever receiving the gratuity. The last time he had gone to Enugu, which was more than a year ago, two retirees like him had collapsed in the queue and died. Instead the government should listen to them when they protested peacefully, the police rather use teargas on them. (87)

Popular communal wars in various parts of Nigeria aptly constitute part of the plot. The novel states that war is everywhere in the country. In the voice of the security guard who is a minor character in the novel, "Na so so fight for dis country every time: Niger Delta; Ife and Modakeke; Aguleri and Umuleri; Muslims and Christians; university students and police; president and vice president." (138). The way Adimora-Ezeigbo presented this in the novel is not different from the way it is in the present Nigerian setting. The places mentioned in the novel are in reality, the places the real historic actions took place.

Contemporary Facts as a Subject of Contemporary Nigeria Fiction

Though *Trafficked*, from all stretch of imagination, is a typical fiction, as maintained by Perrine (1978) that fiction, in addition to the pleasure it gives, also educates, it educates by chronicling both historical and contemporary facts. Similar to the plights of pensioners in Nigeria, Adimora-Ezeigbo equally very vividly, mirrors the contemporary facts about bombing in the northern part of the nation and the issue of Boko Haram. These are contemporary issues in Nigeria and a source of worry to any positive minded Nigerian. In Oasis, as Nneoma and other girls watch the television one evening, the newscaster states that Muslim rioters attacked churches in Maiduguri, the Capital of Borno State at the end of jumat service on Friday, burning down more than twenty buildings. They killed many Christians with machetes, axes and bows and arrows. Some were stabbed to death in churches where they had taken refuge. (91) The stories of Boko Haram and its ill deeds are no longer news in Nigeria. Recently, in Chibok in Borno State, over two hundred school girls were abducted by members of

the Boko Haram. Bombing in public places and churches in the north is a daily affair. Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly “fictionalized” the fact using the invented characters. As the girls in Oasis watch television, and the issue of bombing is being televised as it is a case in Nigeria, one of the girls suggests that they try another television station and the station is relaying the same story as “The riots began on Friday evening in Maiduguri have spread to locations in the north.” (91).

It is a known fact that unemployment in Nigeria and greed among Nigerians are among the major causes of corruption and decadence in Nigeria. Adichie vividly mirrors this realistic fact in her *Purple Hibiscus* when Auntie Ifeoma laments over the condition of the country. She eventually takes her family outside Nigeria because the corrupt government has vowed to deal with her because she fails to sing praises to the corrupt rulers. On daily basis, we hear news of vandalism of oil pipelines in Nigeria. This in many occasions, results in scarcity of petroleum products in Nigeria. The fact that the vandalism could cause some hazards to the society and death of individuals is not always put into consideration. All that the hoodlums are interested in is the gain that they can make out of the ill acts. Nobody cares for the good of the nation. In a dialogue between Ofomata and his friend in the university, we hear Ofomata’s friend say “There was an explosion in Ejigbo. People were siphoning fuel from oil pipelines and it caught fire, it’s terrible. Over two hundred people were roasted alive.” (101) It is a pathetic issue that as all the tragedies happen, people fail to take corrections. On regular occasions, pipelines are vandalized in Nigeria and people die in millions while trying to scoop the products from the vandalized pipelines.

It is a fact that government workers in Nigeria are not always well taken good care of by the government; their salaries are not always paid on time, yet the amount paid as salaries is not enough; the plights they witness in their places of work, not put into consideration. These and more, therefore, are the reasons for incessant strikes by workers in Nigeria. Almost all sectors of labour unions embark on strikes and the wealth of the country is always adversely affected. In her *Trafficked*, Adimora-Ezeigbo quite aptly mirrors this fact. She goes further to recount the negative consequences of the recurrent strikes to both the individuals and the country’s wealth.

The fact that any time students have any cause to protest for anything, touts join the students and make what has originally planned to be peaceful demonstrations to become real riot is well incorporated in the fiction. This has been a serious problem in Nigeria. In 2002, for instance, when students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka planned to have a peaceful demonstration in protest against hike in school fees. Strangers and touts in Awka and environs joined so that the demonstration originally planned to be peaceful transcended to a violent and destructive riot. In the end, the students were made to pay for all the damages. Again, during the annual Imo Awka festival, a ritual festival celebrated once a year only by Awka people, strangers who are

supposed not to participate, feature so actively. These strangers are the people who cause trouble during the festival. This issue of strangers and touts joining the students whenever they protest against any issue pertaining to them, is a common thing in Nigeria, it is equally a worrisome issue because whenever it happens, properties worth millions of naira are damaged. Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, vividly categorically x-rays the plights of people during any such protests, especially in Lagos State University. In the novel, Professor Jimoh who is on his way for a very serious matter is halted by the rioters. At first, he believes that as it is a mere protest by the students and therefore, he is optimistic that there would be no cause for alarm until he is halted (174). The way Adimora-Ezeigbo gives the categorical description of Awka, the capital of Anambra State, with historical figures and facts clearly distinguished the novel from other works of imagination where all the episodes are invented.

Adimora-Ezeigbo, unlike some Nigerians who would exhibit philistine attitudes in condemning the ills of the government, boldly indicts the government as being responsible for the ill acts of Nigerians. This is a known fact! When the mind is idle, it tends to conceive ill thoughts. The novel states that Adaye and Mma had remained at home for nearly nine months during the teachers' strike and that "the state government had done nothing to address the teachers' grievances, so the strike had dragged on. Most of the teachers had started trading to survive, as did many of the pupils and students. Some helped their parents work their land. A few had become armed robbers, terrorizing people in their homes or snatching cars from drivers in the highway." (109) with this, Adimora-Ezeigbo strongly affirms that our leaders are responsible for the high rate of crimes in the country because if the youths are gainfully employed and the teachers do not go on strike, everybody would be busy and none would conceive any ills in one's mind. In the same vein, as the government does not care about the welfare of the youths who are believed to be the leaders of tomorrow, the pensioners too, are treated as the deadwood they are alleged to be by one of the governors in Nigeria.

The Murder of Saro Wiwa

Like Adichie vividly chronicles the historical fact of the murders of Ken Saro Wiwa and other human right activists by the military heads of state, Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly x-rays this historical fact too, not hiding any fact about the historical episode. One reading the text, in addition to the pleasure a fiction gives, also tends to grasp historical facts including the historical dates the historical actions that took place. Perhaps, why Adimora-Ezeigbo has decided to put this section in italics is because it is a mere documentation of facts as she witnessed it. She writes that on 8 November, writers of Nigeria – WON – an organization with members from parts of the country, plan to celebrate the Kenule Saro Wiwa, the writer, environmentalist and minority rights activist, who was hanged by Nigeria's military government under General Sani

Abachi. In November 1995, for a crime many believed was a frame up. Saro Wiwa was hanged with eight other prominent members of the movement for the sovereignty of Ogoni people – MOSOP.

Conclusion

In blending imagination and reality, Adimora-Ezeigbo, like Adichie is so meticulous that the subtle way the facts and imagination are knitted is commendable. She so effectively knits the facts and imagination into the plot and still maintains a single major plot. Aristotle maintains that a good plot should be single and not double. By this, he means that even when there are sub-plots, they are dependent on the main plot and that before the story comes to an end, the various conflicts and complications that constitute part of the subplots must be unraveled. Adimora-Ezeigbo and Adichie put this fact into consideration while plotting their individual novels and that is why real facts that constitute the sub-plots of their individual novels are so effectively integrated and the features of a good plot still maintained

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