

“GIRL-CHILD” TRAFFICKING AND SEX SLAVERY IN AFRICAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF AKACHI ADIMORAH-EZEIGBO’S TRAFFICKED---- Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye

“Girl-Child” Trafficking and Sex Slavery in African Fiction: An Analysis of Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*

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Abstract

Sexual exploitation of the girl-child for commercial purposes is both a domestic and international problem. Human trafficking and sex slavery require serious attention because they affect the physical and mental health of their victims. This paper explores the psychological impacts of sex slavery and human trafficking on the “girl-child” in Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*. The selected novel clearly depicts the after-effects and negative consequences of trafficking and sexual exploitation. This research aims at exposing and creating awareness on the consequences of human trafficking and sex slavery on the girl-child as modern forms of slavery. In order to achieve this, the researcher employs the Trauma theory to depict the pain and agony associated with trafficking and forced sexual activities. However, it is discovered that both domestic and international trafficking of girls for commercial sex works have psychological or emotional implications which impinge on their growth, health and general well-being. The victims are oftentimes seen as social misfits and outcasts of the society; hence, this affects them psychologically or emotionally since people do not want to associate with individuals that have been trafficked and sexually exploited. In essence, strong negative stereotype is attached to victims who are viewed as a disgrace to their family and country. It is also important to note that the term “girl-child” as used in this paper refers to girls who are still under the guidance of an adult and not above 18 years. Hence, characters especially girls are discussed here because, they are particularly vulnerable to certain human rights violations, and therefore require additional protection.

Key words: Sex Slavery, Human Trafficking, Trauma Theory, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Introduction

Trafficking and Sex slavery have become so rampant in Africa and in the world today. Thus both are perceived as modern forms of slavery which impinge on the general well-being of boys, men, women and girls in particular. Taneem Saeed (2015) asserts that “although it has been 200 years since slavery was officially abolished, there are millions of people across the world who are still subject to slave-like conditions. Trafficking is the biggest and fastest means by which people are exploited and forced in to slavery”. Currently, sex slavery and human trafficking are among the most lucrative and fastest-growing sources of income for some girls and secretly organized criminal organizations all over the world. According to Taneem Saeed (2015), “there are many kinds of human trafficking. According to the mentioned UNDOC report, sexual exploitation is with its 79% the far most common form of human trafficking. The second

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most common is forced labour (18%). In Africa, most of the different kinds of trafficking take place. Farm labour, domestic work and sexual exploitation are common types of trafficking. Women can also be trafficked to be “wives”, and girls can be sold as child brides. Children can also be trafficked for use in ritual sacrifice or as child soldiers”.

Generally, girls’ trafficking for sexual exploitation is still considered profitable in Africa since existing punishments are relatively lenient compared to trafficking other materials such as drugs, arms and other explosives. Human trafficking or sex slavery is a very complex phenomenon. Every cultural milieu is directly and indirectly affected. Oftentimes, girls from less developed countries in Africa are trafficked into developed and industrialized nations such as Italy, Spain, United States, UK and others for different purposes. Osita Agbu (2003:29) views “human trafficking as an act of carrying men, women and children from their natural homes or habitation to foreign places where they may not be able to trace their way back home”. Agbu (2003:1) further explains that:

Human trafficking tends to be systematic in its occurrence especially that its span increases as the globalization process intensifies. Though previously in existence in forms such as prostitution, child labour and domestic servitude. Today, contemporary human trafficking is an organized business just as the transatlantic slave trade was with various linkages spread around the globe. Today, not only children and women are trafficked; young boys seeking greener pastures abroad also fall prey to this evil. It can safely be argued that in this age of jet-planes, cellular phone, and the Internet, there are faster means of dealing in human commodities than before. There is little doubt that globalization has created inequalities and inequities resulting in the migration of the poor to the rich regions of the world.

However, there are socioeconomic, sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and environmental circumstances that encourage girls to become victims of sex slavery and trafficking such as poverty, excessive materialism, lack of good parental background, peer group influence, oppressive cultural traditions and quest for freedom. These social issues or problems have eaten deep into the mentality of the common people in society to the extent that their moral conscience and behaviours are deeply affected. This is to say that as a result of economic hardship, many people have descended too low by engaging in sex slavery or human trafficking for one reason or the other ; thus having little or no control over their lives, emotions or experiences. Hence, their movements, bodies, aspirations, experiences and emotions are controlled by others. Jones et al(2011:203) explain that “Sexual slavery or servitude attaches the right of ownership over one or more individuals with the purpose of forcing them to engage in sexual activities such as forced prostitution/labour, forced marriage, and sex trafficking”. In essence, sexual slavery is seen as a form of enslavement which includes limitations on an individual's freedom, and choice of deciding issues relating to her sexual experiences. On the other hand, Sex trafficking as a form of human trafficking involves the transportation of individuals (especially girls) by force, deceit or falsehood to a different environment for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation or abuse. In many cases, the girl victims are pushed or lured into this illicit act by poverty and lack of employment opportunities depending on the problem bedeviling an individual in given society. Some girls oftentimes are deceived with offers of foreign employment such as teaching,

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housekeeping (nanny job) or marketing jobs only to be forced into sex slavery or prostitution under strict monitoring or deplorable conditions in foreign countries.

Sometimes, these girls loose touch of the real society as they are molested and abused in countries where they do not speak nor understand the perpetrators’ language. Most times, girls’ passports or identification papers are confiscated and they are subjected to inhuman sexual abuses until they are liberated after paying a huge sum of money as stipulated by their masters, mistresses or agents. However, as a result of economic hardship, many girls subject themselves to prostitution or trafficking; hence, they are fully aware of the implications of these illicit acts as they embark on their quest for excessive materialism. Also many parents subject their daughters to these inhuman acts as a result of poverty. These parents exchange their daughters for money when approached by local or foreign agents who might promise to provide adequate employment for their daughters. Some impoverished parents accept their offer because they expect their girls to support the family while working abroad. Again, some cultural or traditional societies attach undue importance to male children more than the females; hence, many girls are discouraged from continuing their education by their family members. They are thus deceived into engaging in different nefarious activities that negate human moral values to the detriment of their health and future. Therefore, there is an erroneous assumption that the money they earned would help in supporting their families. Thus, many girls are deceived, bought, sold, and trafficked as sex workers. In some cases, girls who are unaware of the reason for being trafficked usually have mixed reactions or regret when they are forced into prostitution. They oftentimes become emotionally or psychologically disturbed as they battle with the reality of their experiences. These bizarre experiences sometimes might push them to commit crimes such as substance abuse, abortion, robbery as well as risk their health to STDS and killer diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS .Also, some girls who may not like the idea of prostitution are also compelled to indulge in it in order to liberate and end the cyclic form of poverty in their families by supporting them financially to the detriment of their lives.

Currently, sex trafficking and slavery have become so rampant in contemporary African societies that they are now perceived as horrendous cankerworms that have eaten deep into the fabrics of these societies. The widespread of these social problems has thus awakened the interest of many African writers as a result of their huge negative consequences on the female gender, family structures, marriages and the society at large. Over the years, African literature has succeeded in depicting various challenges that affect the growth and development of the girl-child. Hence, writers across Africa have embraced literature as a mirror which reflects the society to express sociopolitical, economic, cultural and religious issues. Recently, there is an upsurge in these illicit transactions or behaviours as a result of many social issues; hence girls have been humiliated, dehumanized and killed as a result of sex slavery and trafficking. Girls have become victims of human trafficking, sex slavery, and forced labour. In some African countries , girls trafficking and sex slavery have taken a new dimension and firm roots thereby sending fear down the spine of people whose moral conscience are still alive. Currently, many young girls fall prey to a new trend of trafficking known as baby production or factory. Some of these girls are trafficked while pregnant; some of them are forcefully impregnated by men for the sole purpose of selling their babies after delivery. It is believed that the majority of these traffickers work with health personals, doctors or nurses in order to carry out their illegal and

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criminal businesses. Hence, baby factories are sometimes disguised as maternity homes, clinics, orphanages and social welfare homes for displaced individuals in society. Some believe that babies delivered under the care of these criminally minded people are oftentimes sold at very high prices for slave labour, rituals, and illegal domestic or international adoptions; however, all these have given rise to more baby factories and thus make young girls more susceptible to this phenomenon.

However, literary artists have not relented in documenting the experiences of girls who have been trafficked for different purposes in order to create awareness on its negative consequences. As a result of this, literary scholars such as Akachi Adimorah –Ezeigbo, Ikechuwu Asika, Chika Unigwe, and others have depicted the ugly and bizarre experiences of girls and women who have been trafficked in order to expose its negative consequences on the female gender and the society at large. However, this paper explores and investigates the psychological effects of sex slavery and trafficking in the selected novel, *Trafficked* in order to expose their psychological impact and long lasting consequences on the victims. To fully explore the above mentioned consequences, Trauma theory is employed for purposes of cushioning the negative effects of sex slavery and trafficking on the girl victims.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework consists of concepts, definitions, approaches or theories that are employed for different studies. This theory is however employed and formulated to define, understand or explain a given concept, idea, or scope of study. Hence, Theoretical framework serves as a structure that supports a given theory in research. **Trauma theory** is an active, interdisciplinary western field of study which has been developed since the 1980s through the mutual exchange of ideas and concepts in the humanities and psychology. The incorporation of trauma theory into exploring literary studies is realized in relation to the influence of psychoanalysis; it has also helped in explaining or exploring the complexities of the relationships during violence or violent acts. Hence, sex slavery and human trafficking which are violent acts fit into this category.

The term, “trauma theory” was first documented and explained in Cathy Caruth’s (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The theory originates from the exposition and explanation of Sigmund Freud on traumatic experiences in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Moses and Monotheism*. In essence, Freud’s concept of “traumatic neurosis,” is what the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 accepted as “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), an idea important in defining the trauma theory. Cathy Caruth (1995:3-5) defines “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event...The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly...To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”.

Trauma theory has been linked to multiple disciplines and fields of study ranging from literature, history, and psychoanalysis to cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology among others. Works by Caruth, Tal, and Hirsch have concentrated on the representation of trauma through literature, film, and photography. (See Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, Hirsch, Marianne.

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Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.) Caruth’s text conceives the idea of “belatedness” at the center of the theory of trauma, arguing that a traumatic event is accessible only in its return. Caruth explores a number of literary texts and also includes an analysis of Alain Resnais’s and Marguerite Duras’s film, *Hiroshima mon amour*. Felman and Laub, LaCapra, and Leys have also engaged with both theoretical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis and how they inform our contemporary understanding of individual and collective psychic wounds in order to fully explore the theory of trauma. (See Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.) (Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Trauma theory is explored across different disciplines such as literature, critical theory, history and historiography, social sciences, legal studies, psychology and psychiatry, etc. Thus, it has influenced and affected many areas of human experiences. Felman (2002) attributes the contemporary interest in theorizing about trauma to “three interrelated twentieth-century occurrences” namely; the discovery of psychoanalysis, the discovery of trauma as a new conceptual center, an essential dimension of human and historical experience, and a new type of understanding of historical causality and of historic temporality. According to him, a traumatic experience occurs too immediately for the consciousness to record, but its mental or unconscious images (memory) come back to the victim belatedly and repeatedly when such action repeats itself. Therefore, memory helps the victim to recall his or her experiences in the forms of dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations etc. Psychoanalysis is an extension of trauma theory. Felman explains that literature appreciates, and in literature traumatic experiences remain open with all its horror, nightmares, silence both cognitive and linguistic breakdown. (Shoshana Felman. *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, 2002.) According to Patricia Clough (2007:6)

Trauma is the engulfment of the ego in memory. But memory might be better understood not as unconscious memory so much as memory without consciousness and therefore, incorporated, body memory, or cellular memory.

Freud located traumatic memories in an unconscious psyche, which is the mind. Patricia Clough and other affect theorists, such as Brian Massumi, located traumatic memory entirely within the brain/body. Hence, there is a strong connection that exists between affect theory and Cathy Caruth’s well known view of trauma. Caruth (1995:152-153) explains that “trauma is experienced as the literal registration of an event . . . Modern neurobiologists have in fact suggested that the unerring “engraving” on the mind, the “etching into the brain” of an event in trauma may be associated with its elision of its normal encoding in memory”. However, Contemporary literary trauma theory further asserts that trauma creates a state of terror excited by sudden appearance of danger which divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a future argument that suggests that identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma. However, various arguments on psychological theory of trauma produce a homogenous interpretation of the diverse representations in the trauma novel and the interaction that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place.

In any trauma novel, the multiple models of trauma and memory explored by the literary artist draws a reader’s attention to the role of place (setting), which functions to portray trauma's

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effects through metaphoric and material resources. Also, the physical descriptions of the geographic place of traumatic experience and remembrance of those actions situate the individual in relation to a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of an individual’s identity or self. In essence, the trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts the relationship between an individual and other people in the society by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral behaviours and social relationships that are connected to specific environments. Fictional works (novels) represent this disruption between a given character and others by carefully describing the place of trauma since the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories imbedded in landscapes that define the character’s identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience. Therefore, condition depicted about a place in the representations of trauma is a major tool in exploring the individual experience within a larger cultural context. In fact, it helps in recalling events or organizing the memory and meaning of trauma.

Trauma, in my analysis, refers to an emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates a given society. The term, “trauma novel” refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on an individual based on recollected memory. One characteristic of the trauma novel is the sudden transformation of the self (personality) ignited by an external factor such as terrifying experience that exposes previous recollected experiences which inform the new perceptions of the self and the society. Therefore, the experience that elicits an extreme response from the protagonist is not necessarily bound to a collective human or natural disaster such as war. The traumatic experience can include, for example, an intimate personal experience of female sexual violence, as found in the selected text, *Trafficked*.

The major trauma theory employed in a given literary piece depends on the nature of the experience which is used to assert the position that traumatic experience produces a “temporal gap” and dissolution of the self. For example, Hurt Kali Tal (1996:15) writes: “Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception”. The above explanations represents Freudian concept of trauma and memory which emphasizes the importance of understanding trauma through narrative recall of a given experience. Tal further opines that the remembrance of trauma is always a nearly exact account of the past, since traumatic experience includes knowledge, and representation. The literary trauma theory articulated by Kali Tal, and other critics such as Cathy Caruth, considers the responses to traumatic experience as an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory. The idea that traumatic experience physically and mentally divides identity is employed by the literary scholars as a metaphor to describe the degree of damage done to an individual’s coherent sense of self and the change of consciousness caused by the experience.

Thus psychological trauma becomes a type of damage to the mind that occurs as a result of a severely distressing experiences or events. This type of trauma is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one’s ability to cope, or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. A traumatic event involves one’s experience, or repeating events of being overwhelmed that can be precipitated in weeks, years, or even decades as the person struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances, eventually leading to serious, long-term

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negative consequences. However, trauma differs between individuals, according to their experiences. Memories associated with trauma are implicit, pre-verbal and cannot be recalled, but can be triggered by stimuli from the environment. Many contemporary African literary scholars such as Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Ikechuwu Asika, Chika Unigwe, Chris Abani and others have depicted the ugly and bizarre experiences of girls and women who have been trafficked in order to expose its negative consequences on the female gender, their growth, and development as individuals in different societies.

Psychological Impact of Human Trafficking and Sex Slavery in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is a lecturer, prolific writer, novelist, essayist and critic. She has written and published many novels that explore and depict the living conditions of the female gender in African cultural milieus. The Snail Sense Feminism as a theory influenced by Igbo cultural traditions is one of her numerous contributions in the area of Feminism, Womanism and Gender studies in Africa. She has dedicated her writing career on exploring topics that border on culture, youth and women development in Nigeria cum Africa. Hence, her major recent preoccupation is on child upbringing and the education of the girl-child. Her selected novel for this paper, *Trafficked* was published in 2008. In this novel, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo gives an insight into the lives of young girls who are trafficked and forced into prostitution. In depicting their traumatic experiences, she carefully and craftily details the plight of girls who are forced or lured into prostitution outside the shores of their countries with the hope of having a better life and the painful efforts those young characters make to escape from their neurotic modes of experiences. Her clear depiction of the girls’ journeys from trafficking to forced prostitution or sexual slavery in an unfamiliar environment captures the psychological trauma associated with those bizarre experiences. Hence, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo passionately carves out the experiences of her female characters in order to tackle the contemporary problem of human trafficking and its stifling effects on the society. Through the protagonist of the novel, Nneoma, the novelist is able to expose the stigma, dangers, psychological trauma, dehumanization and rejection faced by girls who have been trafficked. Also, in detailing the experiences of her characters, Efe, and Nneoma (heroine), she succeeds in exposing various ways young girls can be deceived, trafficked and manipulated into prostitution. Akachi employs the first person point of view in narrating the ordeals of her protagonist. Nneoma narrates her experiences as a victim of human trafficking and sex slavery:

“For personal reasons, I fled from home one Friday morning without telling my family. A friend and classmate had told me some weeks before that some people had helped her secure a teaching appointment in the United Kingdom and she would introduce me to them and I could come with her...So I head for her hometown, which is near mine, to find out if the invitation is still open. It is, and we travel to Lagos together to meet her sponsors. In no time, they get passports and flight tickets for us, and keep them. They show us pictures of the schools where we’ll be teaching and give us appointment letters signed by people with English names” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:126-127)

The novel, *Trafficked* deals with the issues of human trade, that is, girls trafficking through a series of reminiscences. The narration and act of remembering long-past experiences by

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Nneoma, the leading female character in the novel depicts the trauma that goes with human trafficking. Nneoma’s narration clearly exposes the deceit, exploitation and slavery that are associated with girls trafficking; thus, many girls end up as sex objects to both men and women.

Trafficked is a novel of twenty-nine chapters which unfolds the stories and circumstances of different young female characters trapped in human trafficking. The chief protagonist, Nneoma after a slight minor setback in her relationship with Ofomata decides to leave her home town in Ihite-Agu. Her friend convinces her to apply for a teaching job in the United Kingdom which she gladly welcomes without a second thought. In the novel, young girls were deceived and flown out of the country under the guise that a good teaching opportunity awaits them. Nneoma narrates their ordeal:

“We are six young women between the ages of seventeen and twenty. They tell us that we will have plenty of time to pay back our debts to the agency when we start earning money. While in Lagos, we relate with just two people, Eddie and Maria. Everything seems normal. They joke with us as if we were their younger sisters. I am so happy and thank my chi. I am already thinking of the money that I’ll make in the United Kingdom. The only thing that worries me is that we have to take an oath and they tell us the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of the agreement, disobey them or cut links without settling our debts...they used the Bible and an image of arusi.”(Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:127-128)

In order to reiterate various ways girls are trafficked, Ezeigbo also reveals the circumstances that led to the trafficking of another character, Efe. In Efe’s narration to Nneoma, she obviously discloses the deceit and inhuman experiences she encountered in the hands of her exploiters. Efe narrates:

“One day I saw an advertisement in a newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos. It asked young men and women who wished to work abroad to come to a certain address to be interviewed. You know how people longed to leave the country, especially during the military regime.” I responded to the advertisement without my cousin’s knowledge. The office seemed perfectly normal. Quite a number of people were interviewed the same day. Some were rejected, but I was selected. None of the men who were interviewed was taken. That should have alerted me to danger, but I barely gave it a thought at that time. Anyway, before long, all the girls –ten of us–were given a travel schedule. We took an oath to work for the agency until we paid our debts. They claimed they had spent a lot of money getting our passports and tickets.” Well, to cut a long story short, we were taken to Italy and ended up in Palermo. It was terrible. I was sold to a woman called Madame Gold, a Nigerian. She was vicious. She used us shamelessly, made us walk the streets every night.”(Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:98-99)

Through Efe’s narration in the above statement, it is deduced that most girls who are trafficked can be lured and deceived as a result of different circumstances or social problems that make life burdensome for them. Thus, they are lured, coerced or deceived only to be subjected to torture and other dehumanizing acts. The female characters’ experiences expose the fact that young girls are trafficked to different parts of the world to serve as prostitutes with the promise of having a better life. However, in depicting the female characters’ experiences, the reader understands the

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extent of female manipulation and exploitation which is traced to circumstances surrounding the character and her parental background. Nneoma, the protagonist of the novel becomes a victim as a result of various negative circumstances which obstructed the peace, love and unity members of her family once shared. Again, societal problems such as unemployment, poverty, corruption and excessive materialism are also considered as some of the factors that contribute to trafficking girls. Nneoma’s predicament paints a sordid picture of a young girl who strives to liberate her family from the abject poverty that has ravaged them. As a certified holder of National Certificate of Education, Nneoma finds it difficult getting a job. In the novel, “Nneoma heard the wall clock in the corridor chime one. Her mind went back to year she completed her National Certificate of Education training. She couldn’t find a job. There had been a time when trained teachers were guaranteed employment. But those days were over. Other students had the same experience of assiduously looking for a job that was not forth coming” (Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:70).

Her father’s retirement from civil service also worsened the situation. His unpaid gratuity several years after retirement also stiffened the condition of her family. The narrator recounts, “...her father was never paid his retirement gratuity; nor was his pension, and he got tired of going on fruitless trips to Enugu to try to get his money. He descended into depression. Then he took consolation in alcohol” (Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:71).

However, it is imperative to note that sex slavery and human trafficking debase and dehumanize the female gender. Many young girls are raised in poor homes; some are desperate and have no hope of surviving in society; hence, they have become unsuspecting victims in one way or the other. Often times they are deceived with false painted promises which blind their sense of judgment. This explains why those traffickers take undue advantage of their victims; rather than fulfilling their promises, they end up making them sex slaves both domestically and internationally. The implication of this is that these young girls are forced to do all sorts of demeaning sexual acts in order to enrich their pimps or benefactors under strict monitoring. These girls are therefore mandated to sell sex as negotiated by their traffickers without considering their state of mind or choice of men. They thus risk their lives to diseases, brutality, ritualists, drug addicts and death. This is a clear indication that trafficked girls have no real ownership of their bodies; they are only compelled, forced and manipulated to act as directed. Nneoma’s experiences are no exception. In the novel, she narrates her experiences as a trafficked girl to Efe:

I am completely devastated by the life I’m forced to live: hit the night street, waiting for customers, winter, spring, summer and autumn; come back at dawn, wash, eat and sleep till it all begins again at nightfall...I sometimes refuse to cooperate with the customers, especially when they are demand positions I find despicable or when they refuse to use condom or make one of the other nasty demands... (Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:129)

Currently, in Nigeria and other nations in Africa, human trafficking and sexual slavery have become so rampant and normalized. Economic hardship, excessive materialism and unhealthy competition among girls have pushed them into becoming victims. These girls are faced everyday with sexual exploitation, torture or rape with no rights to speak, live or move around. This inhuman and unjust act against the female gender is common in contemporary societies as recently seen in Lybia, Spain, Italy and other European countries. In the novel, the

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same scenario plays out; Nneoma, Efe and other trafficked girls were subjected to inhuman practices against their wishes. They were sold as sex slaves to men and pimps who handled them like sex dolls thus denying them their basic human rights (freedom and choice). It is also noticed that most girls are trafficked to an unfamiliar environment where they could not speak nor understand their customers’ language of communication. In most cases, their passports and papers are ceased by their owners or agents. Hence, this becomes a manipulative technique employed in controlling the girls both physically and emotionally while subjecting them to prostitution. Nneoma’s journey as a trafficked girl clearly supports the above mentioned stance; in the novel, she was trafficked to Rome and bought by Madam Dollar who seriously subjected her to prostitution of all forms before transferring ownership to Baron. Nneoma narrates:

So I walk the streets of Rome for Madame Dollar for three years and still she claims I have not repaid my debt. There is no hope of escape. I do not speak Italian. I know no one in the city. I fear the police like plague as I don’t have valid documents. So I remain with Madam Dollar, biding my time, dreaming of freedom. Then help seems to come in the person of a man called Baron. He takes me and two other girls to London and says he rescued us. In actual fact, he has bought us from Madam Dollar, thus cancelling my` debt. (Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:131-132)

The psychological trauma associated with trafficking and sex slavery is enormous and tortuous. The novel, *Trafficked* exposes the readers to the post-traumatic implication which trafficking has on its victims. Nneoma was weary of men and hated their exploitative nature. Through her narrations, the readers are able to understand the extent of female degradation; hence her plights have thus created a big question on people’s minds as to whether prostitution is a form of male violence against the female gender? One fact remains clear, different experiences during sex slavery and trafficking physically and psychologically injurious to girls. Many of the girls are tortured, raped, beaten and killed with no hope or means of escaping. Thus they are compelled to act against their will. Nneoma describes her experiences with Baron, a well-known pimp who bought her from Madame Dollar:

He rapes and beats me. I refuse when customers demand oral or anal sex and insist that they use condoms and I am sometimes assaulted for this. Baron locks me up and doesn’t allow me to go out except when he takes me with him. (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:132)

In many cases, girls who have been trafficked for prostitution are strictly monitored; they are put under pressure in order to subject their bodies to different forms of exploitations. In Nneoma’s case, “Baron used to call her on the mobile phone he had given her every few minutes when he was away from her, just to make sure she was not planning to escape. He used to tell her he would cut off her legs and one of her breasts if she attempted to run away... she didn’t think it was an idle threat. She lives in fear of him” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:166-167). There is little or no doubt that sex slavery has created inequalities which subdue the female gender to different forms of exploitations. Nneoma , the major character of the selected novel was indebted to her abductors, Madame Dollar and Baron. Nneoma explains that “they never gave me money. They always claimed that I would get no money until I paid my debt. Even when the customers gave me money, they took it from me” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:133). The fact remains that human beings are commercialized and this creates avenue for modern day slavery. This form of

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commercialization or exploitation is engineered by both men and women against the female gender as exhibited by Madame Dollar and Baron. However, one demeaning aspect of human trafficking and sex slavery is that the victims are usually faced with many challenges which impinge on their human rights; hence, the psychological impact of their tortuous experiences and restrictions occupies them with the thoughts of death, escape and a longing to return home. In the novel, Nneoma stole Baron’s wallet in order to escape from his dehumanizing, manipulative and emotional grip. Nneoma narrates:

Another opportunity comes many months later when he takes me out for shopping. I’m alert all the time with my money hidden in my clothes, ready to escape if an opportunity presents itself. On this occasion, he stops for a second to buy a newspaper and as soon as he turns his back, I opened the door gently and get out. I do not look back until I disappeared round the corner of the next street. I run and run and run until I’m out of breathe. I have no idea where I am but I keep going in the direction opposite where I left Baron. (Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:133-134)

Nneoma’s escape landed her into another circle of sexual exploitation; after she escaped from Baron, she met Chindo Okehi a Nigerian and a lecturer who gave her shelter before she was caught and deported by the police. During her stay at Dimgba’s house, Nneoma was sexually molested by Chindo’s friend (Dimgba) despite knowing the situation that led to her escape and desperation. These Dimgba’s actions depict the vulnerability of the female gender in a male dominated social setting. In essence, they were mainly interested in ravaging her body than offering help and shelter to a lonely and molested destitute. Nneoma narrates her experiences with Dimgba:

Why will you not allow me have sex with you, yet you continue to shelter in my house?” Dimgba had said, “in this terrible British cold we can warm each other.” Nneoma huddled shivering on the floor of the damp room wrapped in a thread bare blanket, begged. Please give me time I have been badly hurt in the past four years by men. I am prepared to pay for my board as soon as I find work.” “How will you ever find work without any document? You think you’ll just live here indefinitely?” “But you told me you will help me,” she had pleaded... (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:157-158)

Nneoma was exploited for six years before she was caught and deported to Nigeria. Though the government made provisions for the empowerment of the trafficked girls through the establishment of Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development (OYCSD), Nneoma still received sexual advances from the security guard at the rehabilitation centre despite the efforts to curb sexual exploitation. “Nneoma hated the desire she had seen in the security guard’s eyes. Why did men try to seduce her at her most vulnerable moments? She had experienced that in the teachers’ training college and some male lecturers had sexually harassed her; it had been the same in London when she lived in Dimga Anadus room in a badly maintained house where another Nigerian, Dotun Anibaba, had a room...” Nneoma explains that “it was like living with a cobra and adder trying to evade the deadly attack of both” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:157).

There are many stereotypes associated with human trafficking; trafficked girls are branded prostitutes with no moral values; they are also seen as drug addicts and people with unstable mental or health conditions. On the arrival at the Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Nneoma and the other deported girls overhead one of the air hostesses saying; “shame on you.

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Go and join the rest of the scum, who flew in from Rome a few minutes before you” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:17).

Also, in the novel, Nneoma was traumatized by the stigmatization of trafficked individuals. After being rehabilitated in OASIS as a certified tailor, she was employed by a well-known garment factory owned by Chief Tobias Amadi. However, Chief Amadi’s son’s sexual advances caused a huge physical and emotional loss to Nneoma who was sacked because she was a deportee.

“Nneoma, sit down”, chief Amadi said... “You didn’t tell me you were a deported prostitute when I interviewed you for this job? “ I asked you a question...” You have nothing to say?’ Chief Amadi demanded. “Don’t try to deny it for I got my information from a genuine source: the reporter who interviewed you at the airport...” You know nothing is hidden under the sun.” He smiled ruefully. Our sins will always catch up with us. You are a good worker and talented tailor: no one denies all that. But I cannot keep anyone with your background here. So I’m terminating your appointment with immediate effect”. (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:272-273)

Girls are facing different forms of sexual exploitations every day. They have become sex slaves in the hands of unsuspecting men who manipulate their emotions to achieve selfish aims. In the novel, Nneoma’s elder sister, Hannah was lured and sexually exploited by Prophet Elijah who molested her regularly.

If Hannah had known the danger that faced her as a concubine of Elias, she wouldn’t have run away with the self-proclaimed prophet... Hannah fell under Elias spell when a friend took her to his church one Sunday, three years after Nneoma had disappeared. Frustrated by her father’s complaints and pathetic groans over the non-payment of his gratuity and pension and the loss of his favourite daughter... unable to find a job after her secretarial studies and lacking much of the comeliness of her younger sister, Nneoma , which made men slaves to passion when they saw her, Hannah fell for the first man who paid her serious attention.(Adimora-Ezeigbo , 2008:169-170)

The trauma of sex slavery and human trafficking is indeed enormous. In order to lessen their pain, Efe and Nneoma decided to share their bizarre experiences; Efe says: “I know we have both been hurt, terribly hurt. I see it in your movement, in your silences. I am sure you also see it in me; however much I pretend all is well” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008:97). These characters in the novel; Nneoma, Efe and Hannah developed a courageous stance after their traumatic experiences as sex slaves. They tactically sought for escape and freedom as they patiently endured different humiliating and painful experiences. Nneoma walked the streets of Rome and London as a prostitute; she also lived a life of fear for many years as a trafficked girl under Madam Dollar and Baron before she escaped and was deported with Efe. Through Nneoma’s advice, Efe also escaped being abducted a second time by Baron who disguised as Fineface in order to lure her into sex trafficking. Hannah on her part also basked free from the emotional manipulative tendencies of the fake prophet, Elijah and returned to her family. In depicting the experiences of these characters, Adimora-Ezigbo captures the traumatic conditions of her female characters and the frantic efforts they made to stand up to their oppressors. These girls did not stop at that, they attempted securing good jobs after rehabilitation at OASIS centre in order to improve their self worth. Nneoma learned tailoring at OASIS centre, after being sacked from her

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first job, she wrote JAMB and got admission at Lagos University of Science and Technology to study Business Administration. Hannah, who recognized her folly escaped from Prophet Elijah and started a trade. Efe went back to her family at Benin; she got a job at a salon and later married her heartthrob.

Conclusion

Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo through the novel, *Trafficked* is able to skillfully bring to the attention of readers various social issues that can lead to human trafficking and the dehumanization of the female gender by both men and women. The novel also presents the need for girls to be aware, educated and enlightened about the dangers of human trafficking and the processes involved in pinning girls down. Sex trafficking as a 21st century trend poses a great danger to all societies. Girls who fall victims to human trafficking are most times hoodwinked into it by men or women who offer financial or other forms of help to them. However, after being trafficked, their experiences are usually horrendous and life threatening leaving them broken, hurt and fearful. Their dehumanizing experiences also hamper their emotional stability as they recoil and yearn for routes of escape. One of the demeaning challenges of human trafficking is stigmatization; this is capable of affecting the mental state of an individual. It can also push victims to commit suicide, resort to substance abuse or join bad gangs. In the novel, characters like Nneoma lost her tailoring job because she was an international prostitute and deportee. She and the other deported girls were scorned by the press, hostesses and other people at the Airport as a result of different nefarious activities which negate human virtues. Life as a trafficked girl subjected to prostitution traumatized and shamed Nneoma. However, these experiences did not stop her from plotting her escape from her first and second abductors. She succeeded in escaping but fell into the web of Nigerian men who offered her shelter and tried demanding sex. Her second escape came swiftly because she was caught by the police and deported back to Nigeria. However, in the novel, Akachi Adimora gave her novel a swift turn by depicting characters that rose up to their challenges in order to add values to their lives. In essence, all the female characters whose experiences were depicted embraced their challenges and emerged strong in order to rewrite their past. But the fact remains that some of these girls can still be traumatized by their past experiences whenever similar events occur in marriage, outside marriage or anywhere in society. A good example of this is when Nneoma was traumatized by men’s sexual advances and exploitation in Italy under her mistress, Madame Dollar and UK after being bought by Baron. These dehumanizing experiences had a psychological impact on Nneoma; she became so depressed and vehemently refused any form of exploitation by men like Chindo’s friend (Dimgba) in UK and Chief Amadi’s son in Nigeria despite knowing their major influences over her circumstances. This is an indication that trafficked girls are often molested, exploited and stereotyped as a result of their past experiences. This action by men however triggered a memory which reflected Nneoma’s hatred for past humiliating experiences and challenges as a sex slave. These humiliating experiences thus caused a psychological trauma, a type of damage to the mind of the major character, Nneoma. This trauma occurred as a result of different severely distressing experiences or events which devalued her self-worth, rights and pride as an individual. It is important to note that this type of trauma is often the result of different overwhelming amount of stress which exceeded Nneoma’s ability to cope with sexual exploitation. Hence, she stole Baron’s wallet and escaped from his

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deadly grip and web of manipulation. Sex slavery and human trafficking are dangerous trends in contemporary Africa which impinge on the freedom of the girl-child; hence, the government, NGOs, Human Rights Agencies and citizens are urged to be patriotic and assist the law enforcement agencies in exposing, arresting or prosecuting perpetrators of human or sex trafficking as well as other international bodies in order to protect her human rights.

This paper affirms the fact that trafficking and sex slavery are widespread among different countries in Africa as observed by Osita Agbu (2003). The main factors that encouraged human trafficking and sexual slavery in the selected novel are poverty, unemployment, lack of family unity, excessive materialism and peer group influence. The protagonist, Nneoma, a certified holder of National Certificate of Education finds it difficult getting a job; her job hunt created an avenue for the traffickers who manipulated her into prostitution. This study however submits the fact that parental guidance, discipline, love and care contribute to shaping the behaviour of girls who are under their care. Nneoma was deceived and trafficked because she lost her parental love and control; her father took to drinking alcohol and quarreled frequently with his wife. This also created an atmosphere of chaos and disunity which pushed Nneoma into searching for available jobs in order to help her poor family. Consequently, no individual in any given cultural milieu openly supports human trafficking and sexual exploitation, but the fact remains that the practice is common as a result of different social and economic problems. However, this study highlights some ways to curb human trafficking and sexual slavery such as the need to provide employment opportunities, increase parental love and unity, reporting any suspected form of trafficking to appropriate authorities, creating awareness and educating the girl-child on the dangers of trafficking.

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