

Human Trafficking in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo Trafficked (2008)

GRACE ITORO IBANGA

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract. The evil of human trafficking has often been propagated only on the social media for many years, and people have had to doubt the reality of these reports. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo has not only creatively visualised the evil of human trafficking, but has also made the reader to feel the forceful involvement of the innocent youth in the exercise of human trafficking. The creative depth of *Trafficked* is characterised by the stark reality of social and moral issues in Nigerian communities, often caused by the Nigerian immigrants in Asia, Europe and America. The novel exposes the degeneration perpetrated by unscrupulous adults and their inordinate quest to amass wealth. This paper portrays Adimora-Ezeigbo's advocacy for the re-evaluation of the social, moral and cultural values which underscore the rehabilitation of the Nigerian youth to ensure better living conditions and the achievement of human labour and dignity.

1. Introduction

The human society is interested in a wide range of women oppression which results in objectification and loss of identity. The changing norms of popular culture continue to break the traditional strictures, and devise new methods of exploiting the women sexuality in all manifestations. Sex trafficking seems to be the modern approach of slavery in which women are used as commodities in the sex trade.

The term “Sex trade” or “Sex industry” (Sargent 2009:175), is claimed to be a recognised category of work, and prostitution is a subcategory of sex work. The so-called sex industry is legalised in many countries of the world on the belief that the prostitutes and their clients need a safer and a healthier environment to operate. What Sargent is saying is that, both men and women who work as prostitutes in some countries have legally enforceable contracts which require stipulated hours, pay health care, trade union, and a whole lot of issues. This concept prostitution or sex work is quite controversial among feminists, with strong positions both for and against. One of the arguments against the legalization of prostitution or sex work is that, it is an organised crime against women.

The reason so far, is the rampant poverty that characterises most Nigerian families, which makes it easier to prey upon poor women or girls. This is seen in situations where girls are tricked into believing that they are going to work in Europe or the United States of America for greener pastures. Some of the clients that kidnap or trick the helpless girls into forced prostitution give them some sort of oath to lure them to sleep around with other clients, while they (mistresses) get the pay. At other times, they threaten to kill family members in their home country if at all they try to escape. The African feminists are vehemently against the sex industry or sex trades, and they solicit that, the female novelists should educate their society by being the heart of their moral consciousness.

The essence of such decision would discourage the young girls who think that it is only in Europe, United States, Asia, etc, that they can make it. In Admiora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), there is great evident of commitment as she advocates against the humiliation and injustices the Nigerian women encounter when they are deceived into the sex industry.

By still examining the root cause of sex trafficking or sex industry in recent times, Bertone (2013:257) points to Nigeria's socio-economic and political structures; particularly the "Structural Adjustment Programmes" (SAPS), implemented during General Ibrahim Babangida regime, which was a reflection of the mutil-layered self-serving, hypocritical, government that increase Nigeria's international debt, over validation of the Naira, internal corruption and declined into poverty" (Nadaswaran 2014:166). Further evident as portrayed by Carling (2006:45) shows that many Nigerian women are victims of trafficking - sexual exploitations, humiliation, forced labour, the removal of vital organs or servitude, between 1995 and 2005. It is believed that some of those women accepted the choice of prostitution or sex work because of low income and their lack of other means of survival (Shannon 1997:124). Nadaswaran (2014:165) ascertains that many studies of some sexually exploited women and girls have exhibited high degree of abuse, molestation, humiliation and, sometimes addiction occurring before and after as a result of sexual exploitation.

2. Feminism and Human Trafficking

Feminism is the theoretical frame work on which we are locating this discourse. It is from the feminist perspective that the import of human trafficking would be understood

taking into cognizance the patriarchal injustice as put forth by Heywood (2006a :xx), who posits that third -wave - feminism include any approach, as long as it pays attention to gender issues and favours social injustice. The third -wave- feminism maintains that women do not accept the notion that, all women share in the same set of experiences and challenges. But they still believe that there are certain experiences which are personal to the way the world operates. This means that feminists have come to realise that, what some women initially assumed were personal problems of most women at other places, for example: male-centered - sexual practices, wife battery, unequal division of household duties, domestic violence, etc; are now commonly shared among women of different countries. Feminism has highlighted the fact that the patriarchal structures of different societies culminate such problems, thereby making the personal to become political.

The phrase "the personal is political" is still a fundamental issue that welds feminists consciousness together. And the aspect of sharing personal experience informs what Snyder (2008:184) calls: "Consciousness-raising" (CR). The concept of the "consciousness - raising" (CR) is that, when women hear or read about the true - life - experiences of different set of individual women; the girls and the young women will gather more knowledge into their own lives, and they would be highly aware of the societal or cultural structures in which they live. This conforms with what Adimora - Ezeigbo (2008:97) wraps up together as the most powerful doctrine of African feminism. Efe succinctly states:

I just want to be your friend in the real sense; to carry some of your burden, if you allow me and also get you to share some burden of mine, if you are willing. Nneoma,

we're all broken inside. Look, why don't we just tell each other what happened to us? Perhaps finding our voices will help us heal.

This implies that it is when women have shared their experiences, whether positive or negative with one another, that is when they can find strength to continue in their quest for independence. Of course, Adimora-Ezeigbo's ideological perspective gives birth to African feminism which Chilwa (2014:103) claims is "a novel paradigm of alternative to other ranges of feminism. [It] refocuses on women's experiences with detailed attention to peculiarities, specificity and the ethnicities of the diverse forms in which they are oppressed". African feminism believes that it is through the idea of sharing each other's burden by telling and retelling of the individual experiences that they can assist other women to be well abreast of universal events.

The concept of "human trafficking" signifies "the act of recruiting, laboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force fraud, or coercion" (United States Department of State, 2014:29). This implies that the issue of human trafficking is not something that a trafficked girl or women is aware of, or determined for herself, she only sees herself a victim due to the prevailing circumstances of poverty that exposes the unfortunate girl vulnerability to such an in human practice. Human trafficking has been designed by the federal legislation according Kingshott and Tonisha (2016:3), "to stop the inter State transportation of women and girls for the purposes of prostitution". Through attempt have been made by some Nations - United States, United Nations – to stop human trafficking, yet there are still cases of such practices everywhere in the world including

Nigeria. Ebbe and Das (2008:6); Territo and Kirkham (2010:15) advocate of a complete set of "push and pull" syndromes which perhaps have identified that women and girl- children are specifically vulnerable to being trafficked victims. Kingshott and Tonisha (2016:3) enumerate the following factors as being responsible for human trafficking – the system of patriarchy, violence against women, the feminization of poverty and migration globalization, and the capitalist market systems, together with the practice of consumerism and commodification.

3. Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and the Concept of Human Trafficking

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) is a projection of the nuance and sensibility of a typical poverty motivated sex work and human trafficking. It also highlights the complex practices of "compelled" labour or commercial sex act through the use of force criminal networking. It depicts the criminality and horrors the trafficked young women encounter at Italy where they were taken to, and subsequently in London before they were deported to Nigeria. Above all, it portrays the successful freedom and the empowerment of the young women into the main stream of society. The initial thoughts of the young trafficked women has been that they are negotiated into a lucrative job opportunities but they realise of late that they have been introduced into sex industry and are compelled to settle in the sex business. Adimora-Ezeigbo uses Nneoma and Efe, as representatives of the fifteen deported young women to narrate the deplorable experiences of being tricked into sex work and the planned economic liberation. Adimora-Ezeigbo presents a fictional narrative to illustrate a perceptible

understanding of the so called “International sex – trade” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 126), of modern slavery.

In *Trafficked* (2008), Adimora-Ezeigbo employs Nneoma her protagonist, to recount the extent to which she was trapped into the sex commercial trade: “A friend and classmate had helped her secured a teaching appointment in the United Kingdom, and she would introduce me to them and I could come with her.” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 126).

She recounts that after she accepts the offer to go with her friend to Lagos to meet her sponsors, they secure passports and tickets for her and her friend. Of courses, the traffickers have not wasted time in showing them evidence to arouse Nneoma’s interest that, what she is seeing, is nothing but real. Nneoma states: “They show us pictures of schools where we’ll be teaching and give us appointment letters signed by people with English names.” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 127)

Nneoma’s naivety is capitalised by the sponsors for two reasons I guess: (1) she is from a very poor background which in first instance, propels her to take the decision to travel to Europe to be able to assist her parents. She reflects:

...She glanced at the other girls and saw mixture of fear anger, sadness and disappointment in their faces. She was sure her own face was equally marked by these emotions. She had left with so much hope and aspiration now she was returning in shame and hopeless. (Adimora – Ezeigbo, 12).

The novelist sympathises, with Nneoma because though a qualified teacher with the National Certificate of Education (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 70), yet she could not get any job

after many years of graduation. Moreso, when she reflects upon what her father once promised her mother during the time of a critical family crisis with Ezeozo Eke, her father’s brother: “Mrs, please calm down. It is getting late. This will be sorted out tomorrow” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 29). She feels psychological traumatise in that, until she takes the decision to follow her friend: “It was never sorted out and her family- her parents, her brother, her two sisters and herself- had continued in the cramped until she left home”. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 69-70).

(ii) Her so - called sponsors – Eddie and Maria in Lagos, (Adminora-Ezeigbo, 127) have known fully well that she is an innocent girl who has no knowledge about hoodwinking syndrome, otherwise Nneoma would not be very free with strange: “six young women between the ages of seventeen and twenty... Eddie and Maria they are with us as if we were their younger sisters. I am so happy I thank my chi. I am already thinking of the money I will make in the United Kingdom” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 127). The novelist captures the naiveté’s of these young women the more, when she depicts how the traffickers dupe and forced them: “to take an oath and they tell us the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of the agreement, disobey or cut links without settling our debts...” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 127-128).

The condition of Nneoma and other young women in *Trafficked* (2008) is succinctly equated with what Russell (2014:5,36) describes as “The feminization of poverty is stated to be closely aligned with the feminization of migration, with both contributing to the gender narratives of human trafficking victims”. Nneoma is not the only one among the young trafficked women that has horrific experience of the whole ordeal, Efe is also from a poverty

afflicted home in Benin. She wants a better life for herself and family and that is why she responds to: “an advertisement in a newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos”. Little has she known that it has been a call into becoming a victim of trafficking.

Adimora-Ezeigbo reveals other painfully experiences that the trafficked girls encounter in Italy where they are taken to, and other devastating situations. Efe recounts:

*it was terrible, I was sold to a woman called Madam Gold a Nigerian
She was vicious she used us shamelessly, made us walk streets every night ... Madam Gold sold me to a pimp a white man-after four years of slaving, for her. I worked for I escaped* (Adimores Ezeigbo, 99-100).

This reveals the types of suffering the trafficked victims go through in the hands of their exploiters, Adimora-Ezeigbo reveals that the trafficked victims are sometimes drugged, humiliated, raped, beaten, to be secured their co-operation and submission. This art conforms to Nadaswaran’s (2014:167) observation that: “the more broken a slave’s spirit was the more acceptable she was of the use of a slave”

Adimora-Ezeigbo uses harsh words such as “vicious” “shamelessly” to describe Madam Gold, as well as to expose the state of degradation and humiliation in which the trafficked women are subjected to on daily basis. The novelist also uses Nneoma’s experience to further emphasise the evil of human trafficking and the wickedness of the agents in the sex industry. She states that:
There’s a woman called Madam Dollar-nothing comes between her and money. She owns us...she keeps us prisoners in her flat.

Life is hell in Rome - we are always walking the night, selling sex to Italian men and foreigners. I hate Madam Dollar... So I walk the streets of Rome for Madam Dollar for three years... There is no hope of escape ... Baron... bought me from Madam Dollar, thus cancelling my debt... Baron sends the other girls to brothels and keeps me in his flat. Instead of putting me on the street, he brings the men to the flat. Baron is sadist. He rapes and beats me... Baron locks me up in the flat, and does not allow me to go out except when he takes me with him. (Adimora – Ezeigbo, 131-132)

Adimora-Ezeigbo buttresses that human beings are full of wickedness in their enterprise. She shows that women have been pointing accusing fingers at patriarchy as being the worst enemies of their souls. But from the accounts given separately by both Efe and Nneoma which have the same flavour of wickedness, violence, humiliation and oppression; Adimora-Ezeigbo is telling us that the sins of women is as degrading and humiliating to fellow women like themselves, is equally worse as that of men to women. According to the idea and beliefs posit by Barner, Okech and Camp (2014:20) on patriarchal watch: “Women are lured by traffickers promising to deliver them to their desired destination or help them secure employment”. This implies that, it is the quest for better living conditions that push women to succumb to the pressure of traffickers.

Adimora-Ezeigbo uses the two girls’ confessions to “cleanse women body, spirit and soul from whatever has... Terribly hurt” that had afflicted them in the past. (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 97, 135). She gives them hope to forgiven themselves and move on with their lives. Efe posits:

... You must let go and move on. I don't know what happened to you, but it's not healthy to be so bitter to punish yourself like this. (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 97).

Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), besides narrating the horrifying side of human trafficking and the state of human nature of one hand, it also depicts the transcendence of the once victimised trafficked victims. She allows Nneoma and Efe to: "... just tell each other what happened" to them as a mean of their "... finding their voices" to bring about healing to their spiritual, physical and psychological beings. Adimora-Ezeigbo's decision to encourage the trafficked characters to transcendence into communal sharing put them on an edge over their oppressors. Why? This is because the secret of what holds men top wickedness has been exposed to all sectors in the world.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's does not just allow Nneoma, Efe, and other deported trafficked young women to roam the streets of Nigeria on their return. She rehabilitates them in Oasis Youth Centre for skills Development (OYCSD). Adimora – Ezeigbo empowers the youth through able, dynamic women with high powered potentials to steer the withdrawn girls back to normal stream of life in their society. Adimora – assumes that patriarchy in the course of trading with them in their sex industry might have infected them with HIV/AIDS. She quickly arranges with the commissioner for Women Affairs, and one of the directors of UNICEF to come to Oasis Centre to examine the young women. The Commissioner speaks: *The condition of Nigerian women and children has worsened especially in the past two decades... Violence and brutality and all forms of abuse have multiplied... We have declared war against slavery, child abuse,*

the international sex trade and HIV/AIDS. We want to stamp out prostitution from our society; we want international trade to stop. The trafficking of our girls is despicable and theirs evil trade must be eliminated. (Adimora –Ezeigbo, 55)

This looks like Adimora – Ezeigbo second mission statement. She wants in reality to stamp out slavery and prostitution of all kinds. She empowers Nneoma and Efe to wear the African feminist orientation. Arndt, (40) observes Adimora –Ezeigbo's position that: "what is important is how people demonstrate their belief and how they go out helping other women and ensuring that women are emancipated". Adimora-Ezeigbo's Nneoma and Efe also embody this emancipating mentality through their experience of being trafficked.

Beside the highlight of young women's encounter with the agents – Eddie, Maria, Madam Dollar, Baron etc., Adimora-Ezeigbo also empowers Nneoma and Efe to escape from their captors. Considering the severe beatings, constant violent rapes, and other inhuman treatment, a good number of trafficked women do not always survive. By putting forward infinitesimal number of young women who manage to gain their freedom from their oppressors, Adimora-Ezeigbo recreates females who reject relegation and subjugation. She gives them the self-will to regain their freedom and identities back to normal life both in fiction and in real life, Nneoma dares all consequences to escape from Baron, who bought her from madam Dollar. Nneoma informs: "... ? (Baron) stops for a second to buy a newspaper and as soon as he turns his back, I open the door gently and get out. I do not look back until I have disappeared round the corner of the next street. I run and run and run until I'm out of breath..."

[Adimora-Ezeigbo, 133-134]. It should be noted here that when Nneoma escapes from Baron, she does not have any destination in mind: “.. I have no idea where I am but I keep going in the direction opposite the place I left Baron”. (Adimora – Ezeigbo, 134). But Nneoma considers it a life- long opportunity she can boast of. She grabs it hastily irrespective of the initial “oath she has taken” (Adimora – Ezeigbo, 127) and Baron’s threat that “... he would cut off her leg and one of her breasts if she attempted to run away. He would make sure no one looked at her or desired her again after he had dealt with her. She did not think it was idle threat. She lived in fear of him”. (Adimora Ezeigbo, 167) Nneoma and Efe display new dimension of courage by confronting the trafficking agents and exposing Baron as: “... a cheat and heartless exploiter” (Adimora – Ezeigbo, 136). By giving her female characters the privilege to confront human traffickers, Adimora – Ezeigbo employs her fiction as an apparatus to condemn prostitution, heinous crimes, exploitations and oppressions of all standards. Efe exposes Baron:

“Is your name truly Fyneface, or is it Baron?” For a moment, Baron’s face twitched and fear filled his eyes. He thought Efe might be detective or a member of the Secret Security Service... But could she have discovered his identity as Baron?,, Who was she? A spy using the salon as a camouflage for her real profession?,, “You’re Baron and a bloody trafficker,... This man is a cheat and an exploiter. He is here to traffick women abroad”. (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, 186 – 7)

A close look at the nature of boldness that the novelist has endowed Efe with to confront Baron with all air of alacrity and aggression, is a clear indication that there is a

shift in feminist alienation of characterisation.

Adimora – Ezeigbo uses Efe and Nneoma to recreate strong females that move to the centre from the margin. This is further heighten when Adimora Ezeigbo deliberately gives marriages to Efe, and secures a University education for Nneoma. The essence of these two great achievements and fulfillment in the lives of these characters, confirm Adimora-Ezeigbo as truly African feminist. She gives the positive identities to these newly emancipated young women to disabuse patriarchal early myth of stereotypes - of women as prostitutes, freelance, talkatives, male-haters, witches, etc.

This celebration of assertion and achievement in Efe and Nneoma confirms the literary statement of Eko (1996:218) (as cited in Nada swaran 2014:171).

African women writers have made all the difference to the image of African women. Their projection of women as protagonist, the prepondence of female related themes in their works, their concern for the psychological growth and liberation of women... being their work a personal commitment and sharper vision.

Adimora – Ezeigbo quickly sets up the Oasis Youth Centre for skills Development (OYCSD) to accommodate Nneoma Efe and other deportees after their escape from Baron. This is to protect them incase Baron and other trafficked agents choose to search for them to recapture them. The novelist equally occupies them with different trades which the Centre pays for all the deported young women to learn. The Chairperson – Mrs. Ije Ejekam discloses: “... They progress you make here depends on your ability and how seriously you take the

opportunity open to you... You will be allowed to choose a trade to learn as part of your rehabilitation. On offer are tailoring. Hair-dressing, catering and pottery. We apprentice our girls to be the best practitioners in these trades in Lagos.” (Adimora – Ezeigbo 52).

Nneoma and Efe grab the opportunities and train as tailor and hair dresser respectively. It is from the trade she learns, that Nneoma saves money and sends to her parents through Efe on the day she leaves Oasis: “... I was in Ihite – Agu, your home town... I was able to trace your house after making enquires... I saw a boy emerge from the house and I gave him the money... The boy came out and assured me that he’d given the money to your father – he called him Ogukwe... (Adimora Ezeigbo, 1999). Adimora-Ezeigbo with this act, is advocating hard work and legitimate enterprise for girls and women. She believes that it is by so doing that they will maintain their newly asserted identities and become relevant in their society – economically, socially, politically, etc.

4. Conclusion

Adimora-Ezeigbo uses her fiction *Trafficked* to expose the evil of human trafficking. She allows the withdrawn and trafficked young women to transcendence in positive enterprises in life, and in their society. She encourages the women and girls to be industrious to register themselves useful in both economic and political sectors of their society. She imbues in the young women, virtues to retain their newly asserted spirit. She puts a clarion call to all feminists, most especially the African feminists to educate the girl-child and young women to be outspoken, bold and intelligent, to proffer escape from all forms of slavery and sex industry. Adimora-Ezeigbo advocates a

better Nigeria wherein citizens can live and become free from the traumas associated with living as victims in other people’s countries in search of greener pastures.

References

- Adimora – Ezeigbo, Akachi (2008) *Trafficked* Lagos: Literamed Publications (Nig) Ltd.
- Arndt, Susan (2008) “Paradigm of Intertextuality Orature and Writing Back in the Fiction of Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo in Patrick Oloko (ed) *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo Issues and Perspectives*. Lagos: African cultural Institute. 17- 65.
- Barner, J.R, Okech D. S and C camp, M.A. (2014) Socio-Economic Inequality, human trafficking and the global slave trade, *societies* 4. 148-160 doc. 10:3390/SOC4020148
- Bertone, A.M. (2013) Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Goodheart M. (Editor) *Human rights politics and practice 2nd* (Editun) Oxford: Oxford University Press. 255 – 272.
- Carling, Jorgen (2006) “Migration Human Smuggling and Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe”, Oslo: 10M *International Organization for Migration*.
- Chiluwa, Molly (2014) “Patriarchy Verses Womenism Nigeria: Rethinking Womanist Theorization” *New Perspectives on literary enigma A Festschrift in the of professor Theodora Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo* Emmanuel A.Adedun and Onuora Benedict Nweke (ed) Ibadan: University Press. 102 - 135.
- Ebbe O.N, and Das D.K. (Eds) *Global Trafficking in Women and Children* Boca Raton FL: CRC Press. 2008.

- Eko, Ebele (1986) "Changes in the Image of the African Woman, a Celebration" *Phylon* 210-218.
- Heywood, Lesile (ed) *The Women Movement Today An Encyclopedia of Third Wave Feminist* Vol. 1 A-Z Westport CT: Green wood 2006 a.
- Jungudo, M.M. (2014) "Gender and Human Rights Implications of Women Trafficking in Northern Nigeria", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (26), 2014, 15-2.
- Kingshott Brain and Tonisha, Joes (2016) "Human Trafficking A feminist perspective" in *Academy of Criminal Justice Science*, Grand Rapids M149504: Gran Valley State University, 2016.
- Nadaswaran, Shalini, "Transcendence in Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*" in *New Perspectives on a Literary Enigma A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Theodora – Akachi Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*
- Emmanuel A.Adedun and Onuora Benedict Nweke (ed) Ibadan: University Press. 2014, 164 - 172.
- Rusell, A.M (2014) "Victims of Trafficking The feminization of poverty and migration in the general narrative of Human trafficking *Societies*, 4(4), 52-548
- Shannon, S.L. (1997) "Prostitution and the Mafia the Involvement of Organized Crime in The Global Sex Trade" *Transnational Organized Crime* 3(4), 119 – 144.
- United State Department of States. (2014). "Trafficking in Person" Reports June. Washigton, D.C, United States Department of States.