

Human Trafficking as New Variant of Slavery.

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Abstract

This paper discusses the human trafficking as new variant of slavery, two novels reflected that human trafficking is a new variant of slavery i.e. a mutation of the old slavery. This study posits that human trafficking is like re-inventing the wheel and considered modern day slavery as it has inherent features of old slavery like human degradation, the sale of human beings, servitude, sexual exploitation, cheap work etc. However, the paper discover that in situations like this, women's positions become precarious. Also discovered that the absence of their menfolk as the socially ordained 'protectors' exposes women to grave forms of harassment and abuse, but it also introduces a new order in which women become managers of the social system who not only contain the upheaval of slavery but also sustain the social order.

Introduction

Literature is a canon, which consists of those works in language by which a community defines itself through the course of its history. It includes works primarily artistic and also those whose aesthetic qualities are only secondary. (McFadden 56) Literature represents tradition, culture, and language of people of world in their own way. On the other hand, it functions as initiator of new

worlds of experience, which bypasses its boundary as a historical or cultural creative work. History in the conventional sense can be defined as a record of “real” events that happened in the past. Traditionally, history is considered as a branch of literature, and then as a discipline, that has a close link to science. It is generally taken for granted that there is truth in everything history supplies to the world. In terms of history and history writing, and metafictional novels as Patricia Waugh would term it, it is evident that “history consists of multiple worlds which are fictional” (Waugh104). Thus, history can be defined as writings about how we tell the story of what happened rather than a story of what happened.

Literature may be defined as that which has permanent interest because both of its substance and its form, for a great work of literature, there is the same demand now that there always has been; and in any great work of literature, the first element is great imaginative power. The imaginative power demanded for a great historian is different from that demanded for a great poet; but it is no less marked...on the contrary, very accurate, very real and vivid, presentation of the past can come only from one in whom the imaginative gift is strong. (Roosevelt 8).

Bressler refers to group of critics who narrow the definition by equating Literature to imaginative and/or creative works of art (written or oral), thus the imaginative work of shoe catalogue or cookbook should they be considered works of literature? Other critics add the “test of time” criterion to the major components of literature, regarding those works of art that withstand the passage of time and are still being read as worthy to be called Literature. The above mentioned groups argue that “a text must have certain peculiar qualities before it can be dubbed ‘literature’” (Bressler13). Bressler defines literature as a work that “concretizes an array of human values, emotions, actions, and ideas in story form” (Bressler14)

History writings contain both facts and fictions; facts that which can be debatable. The constituents of these elements overlap and demand for continuous exchange of literary critical activity. E. H. Carr observes that history is neither “a hard core of facts surrounded by a ‘pulp of disreputable interpretation’ nor ‘a hard core of interpretation surrounded by a pulp of disreputable facts’ but a diabolic between the two (Carr 986. 4, 18). In relation

to this, Sartre says literature engages history and distorts history to the realm of uncertainty. He says,

We did not want to delight our public with its superiority to a dead world –we wanted to take it by the throat. Let every character be a trap, let the reader be caught in it, and let him be tossed from one consciousness to another as from one absolute and irremediable universe to another similarly absolute; let him be uncertain of the very uncertainty of the heroes, disturbed by their disturbance, flooded with their present, docile beneath the weight of their future, invested with their perceptions and feelings as by high insurmountable cliffs. In short, let him feel that every one of their moods and every movement of their minds encloses all mankind and is, in its time and place, in the womb of history... (Sartre174)

This study will also explore the idea of the past and how the past events become a platform for the present and future and also intends to take up some select fictions that deals with the current happenings of today.

The general assumption with the abolition of slavery is that the heinous act of slavery is totally extinct and everyone now lives with a medium of freedom. However, the truth is that slavery is like re-inventing the wheel albeit in a modernised variant wearing new colourations. This study will reveal different forms of human trafficking as a new form of slavery. The phenomenon of modern-day slavery aligns with the horrifying operation of human trafficking. This practice constitutes the movement of a group of foreign nationals into another country with the involvement of coercion and fraud (Zhang). Sometimes slavery and human trafficking are treated as separate ideas, but they are deeply intertwined in their operation. Both practices involve the movement of individuals, force, coercion and mostly subterfuge.

Although there are more slaves today than ever before, the practice is not novel. In the past, slavery was accepted as a fact of life. Traditionally, people were used mainly as domestic servants or agricultural laborers. Today, jobs can range from making bricks to forced prostitution. Kate Blewett makes the distinction between slaves today and those in the past, “The difference between now and colonial times is that in the olden days slaves were worth a great deal of money and so were taken better care of. But these people are utterly disposable. They are cheap to buy and cheap to throw away” (Mason).

Most simply, a slave may be defined as a person held in bondage to another, or someone who is the property of another (Meltzer 3). Yet there are many different types of slaves within this broad definition. One form is forced labour, also known as chattel slavery, which consists of a slave who is considered as property of his or her master, and whom can be exchanged for commodities such as cars or money. These slaves are often expected to perform labour and/or sexual favors (Meltzer). This type of slavery is most widely practised in Africa (“Eradication of Forced Labour”). Additionally, a trend called “debt bondage” has emerged throughout the practice of various forms of slavery. This is a form of bonded labour in which a slave is promised to be freed once an original debt is paid off. The International Labour Organization (ILO) explains that the practice of debt bondage is:

Still widespread in some countries and affect a significant number of people. The victims of debt bondage are the poorest people, often illiterate and relatively easy to deceive and be kept in ignorance of their rights; if they try to leave their employment, they are usually caught and returned by force. According to the reports, bonded labour is widespread in agriculture, but has been also detected in mines, brick kilns, leather, fish processing and carpet factories’. (“Eradication of Forced Labour” 37)

In the American South in the 1850s, “a healthy slave was a valuable piece of property, worth up to \$40,000 in today’s dollars” (Masci 290). Today, a human being can be bought for as little as ten dollars. The distinction between the past and present worth of a slave is imperative to having an understanding of modern practices of slavery. Now, slaves are purely a commodity with little value for their life other than peculiar gains to slaveholders, and their freedom or rights are never considered. During the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, philosophers “established new definitions of human freedom and dignity...large numbers of people started questioning the morality of keeping another person in bondage” (Masci 282). The formerly normal practice of slavery became questionable and open to debate.

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. Children may be trafficked for different purposes, including sexual exploitation and domestic work. An estimated one million children are coerced, kidnapped, sold and deceived into child prostitution or child pornography each year, many of them victims of trafficking (Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2012:11& 12).

Nigeria was adjudged by the United States of America a source, transit and destination country for women and children subjected to trafficking in persons, specifically conditions of forced labour and sex trafficking (Ejiofor, 2015). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in its 2014 Global Human Trafficking Reports stated that the cases of human trafficking are on the rise in Nigeria and some major parts of the world (Oluwarotimi 2014:3).

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 globalisation process intensifies. Though previously in existence in forms such as prostitution, child labour and domestic servitude, today contemporary human trafficking is an organised 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 globalisation has created inequalities and inequities resulting in the migration of the poor to the rich regions of the world.

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. Sexual slavery includes the practices of forced or coerced

prostitution, sex trafficking, and child prostitution. E. Benjamin Skinner explains that:

For every one woman or child enslaved in commercial sex, there are at least fifteen men, women, and children enslaved in other fields, such as domestic work or agricultural labor” (Skinner, “A World Enslaved” 65).

The second 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(Taneem).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AS NEW VARIANT OF SLAVERY

Both May Nwoye *Fetters and Choices* and Akachi Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* focus on the practice of child labor, sex trafficking, and forced labour which sheds light to how realistic and brutal slavery and trafficking can be today. These book by Ezeigbo and Nwoye demonstrate how women are used as a form of commodity in the economy to gain personal wealth and mostly how women are always at the receiving end of this inhumane act. In each text, some female characters are consciously sold off in order to make money, while some are deceived into trafficking. Both texts reveal the ordeal and nightmare that people that are trafficked go through in the hands of the traffickers. They reflect how women are the more endangered species of trafficking and the struggle to gain freedom.

Human trafficking also involves selling one’s self willingly or otherwise. When done willingly, people engage in it voluntarily seeing no way out of their unfortunate poverty or economic situation in the case of Itohan who sells her body just to satisfy her mother and make enough money to flaunt around in *Fetters and Choices*. Also, in *Trafficked* we also see the act of willingness to be trafficked and the use of subterfuge (deception) in the novel. Nneoma’s acquiesces to Efe’s story, very much like her own story, confirming the relatedness of the consequences as well as the precursors to the trafficking involvement. The complicity to each event of enslavement becomes clearer to both Efe and Nneoma as they tell each other their experience. That these victims only allow themselves to be deluded is seen in the fact that Efe willingly

enslaves herself again with another prostitute even after she was being liberated from her initial 'trafficked' status. Love advances was made to the unsuspecting victims like Nneoma's friend Efe just to be caught in the web of lies. The parents are willing to release and even push their children into this act because it means less mouth to feed. The victims are already in the trade before the truth about their status is revealed and it is difficult to pull out because poverty awaits them and lots of threats which include the seizing of passport in order to restrict their movement. This is emphasised in the abductor's recourse to oaths using trafficked sculptured images of gods, at varied altars and in compelling conditions, driving the ignorant folks to abide by strange deeds and agreements. The writer reveals these in the confessions of Efe and Nneoma respectively:

None of the men who were interviewed was taken. That should have alerted me to danger, but I barely gave it a thought at the time. Anyway, before long, all the girls – ten of us – were given our travel schedule. We took an oath to work for the agency until we had paid our debts (Adimora-Ezeigbo 99).

Nneoma and Efe in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) started with the deportees and their homecoming experience in Nigeria and attempt to renegotiate their space within society. This book reveals the afterlife of victims of trafficking, but fails to go in depth the act itself. The clinch point in Ezeigbo's text is the threat of re-trafficking experienced by the duo in the hands of the same syndicate Baron, who was Nneoma's cruel pimp before her escape and their struggle for survival. Also, the book reveals how the act of deception is used, in case of Nneoma who was deceived that she innocently agreed to go abroad to be a teacher only for her to become a prostitute as she roams the stream of Rome. Like a slave, she has no freedom only for her earnings to be taken away from her by Mama Dollar. She is beaten and starved by Mama Dollar and her passport is seized. She thought she escaped the harsh reality as Baron buys her from Mama Dollar, unfortunately the suffering increased as Baron uses her to satisfy different men sexual urges. Nneoma cuts the image of a defeated, fallen angel as she loses her identity. The outrage on slavery is visible in Efe's confession to Nneoma here,

Madam Gold sold me to a pimp – a white man – after four years of slaving for her. I worked for my 'new owner' for two years before I escaped. Then I fled to Verona and teamed up with a prostitute I met there and worked independently

for about another year because I wanted to save up money to return home.... Then the police arrested me and I was deported (Adimora-Ezeigbo 100).

Adimora-Ezeigbo's 'invention' in *Trafficked* is most logically predicated on the postcolonial confrontation with a version of slavery. While the enslaver is indicted, there is the rhetorical strategy which implicates the society that is negligent of the plots of certain villains. These deviants inadvertently extend the frontiers of slavery by exploiting the ignorance of the people as well as the indiscretion of the government. This book also reveals the various ways organisations try to help the victims to build a better life by not focusing on their past shame but empowering them with skills. Although Efe encounters Baron when she returned to Nigeria after being deported from trafficking, and is unwittingly attracted to him, she does not let her disappointment of Baron dissuade her from having a good life or neither does she immediately run away from him. She chooses instead to confront her 'prospective' oppressor and Nneoma's former exploiter in an open bar.

Is your name truly Fyneface, or is it Baron [...] Baron's face twitched and fear filled his eyes? He thought Efe might be a detective or a member of the Secret Security Service [...] "You're a liar. You have lied to me all this while. You're Baron and a bloody trafficker. Her voice was loud and heads were beginning to turn [...] This man is a cheat and an exploiter. He is here to traffic women abroad" (186-7).

This gives a voice to women to take a stand against threatening and dangerous people like Baron. Unlike Sisi, who faces her oppressor in death, Efe and Nneoma both participate in resisting Baron in this point zero space of reality where the oppressor is forced to remain stagnant while the female character achieves her goal of 'objectifying' the trafficker, subverting his privileged position of power, rejecting authority. By doing this, Ezeigbo not only reveals to us the continuous cycle of trafficking syndicates but she also aptly creates an intersecting space within fiction to contest what cannot be said directly to these exploiters, she gives women a voice that can be heard, she gives second chance to victim of human trafficking in the society as women rise up against the stigmatization.

The two novels, *Fetters and Choices* and *Trafficked* purposively selected for discussion in this essay, generate trenchant meanings which are immensely

useful in the consideration of human trafficking as a new direction of slavery. *Fetters and Choices* gives us a vivid description of the life of the victim and the repercussion of human trafficking. This book reveals the economic poverty that drives victim into willingly surrendering themselves or relatives into this modern form of slavery.

Ifeoma Nwoye's *Fetters and Choices* is a novel that examines the social and moral dimensions of sex trafficking. The book centres on Itohan Egodi, a teenage girl hoodwinked into high class international prostitution by her money driven and unscrupulous mother, Madam Agnes, whose motto seems to be the phrase "Money is good". The lack of finances is a major factor in the lives of the Egodi, whose house is a depressing symbol of poverty. Itohan's father, Friday Egodi, is a retired security guard once feared by robbers. He is portrayed as an upright man, even though poor is still satisfied with every little thing he gets. He sees life in another perspective which separates him from his selfish and money crazed wife, Madam Agnes. Friday Egodi can no longer provide for his family because of his ailment and only inspires disdain in his greedy wife who resents his lowly condition.

Madam Agnes is equally resentful of her older daughter, Blessing, who refuses to listen to her mother after talking her into going to Italy to 'make' money. Envious of the financial comforts enjoyed by neighbours whose daughters are already in Italy, Agnes pins her hopes on Itohan, Blessing's younger sister, telling the girl 'It is young people like you that are taking the responsibility these days'. Impatient for a better life and the real struggle to satisfy her frustrated mother, Itohan is pushed into going to Italy for 'greener pastures'. Madam Agnes nags her daughter Itohan into going with Mr Fix it (Fine Boy) who uses the act of subterfuge into trafficking Itohan for sexual slavery to Italy. Bad economy should be considered as a force that drives people into doing the unthinkable.

Itohan turns deaf ears to her father's (Egodi) warning about Madam Agnes, saying: "She will ruin you." The words come to haunt the girl who realises too late that her youth has been sacrificed on the altar of her mother's greed and relentless pursuit of money. Madam Agnes watches her daughter die of AIDS and Blessing, the resented older daughter, gets a fulfilled life of a husband and a well-paid job.

As both novelists interrogate the unending issues of slavery in the new form of human trafficking and how it affects women in their novels, the novels also reveal the activities of parallel institutions like the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which fails to live up to expectations. While they are set up to intervene, most often with government support, it appears in Adimora-Ezeigbo's consideration that not much of the anomies are mediated. To a certain extent, the strengths of the NGO's are seen in their rehabilitation of the victims of trafficking and empowerment via skill acquisition scheme. The awareness of the NGO is made to compare with the women who saw the trafficked girls heading for their bus to the rehabilitation camp.

Nneoma's irritation gives the appraisal here: "Those two women had spoken from ignorance...Did they know the condition that drove girls from the country to Europe. They should find out how the girls became trafficked in the first place before opening their smelly mouths" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2008, 23). Nneoma is rather humiliated by the ironic proclamation by the Commissioner for Women Affairs that, "We have declared war against slavery, child abuse, the international sex trade and HIV/AIDS.

New historicism is a form of literary theory whose goal is to understand intellectual history through literature, and literature through its cultural context, which follows the 1950s field of history of ideas and refers to itself as a form of "Cultural Poetics". The term 'New Historicism' was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 to describe his method of interpretation of the Renaissance texts. The term occurred in his book, *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in the Renaissance* (1982). New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. Based on the literary criticism of Stephen Greenblatt and influenced by the philosophy of Michel Foucault, New Historicism acknowledges not only that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances, but that the critic's response to that work is also influenced by his environment, beliefs, and prejudices. A helpful way of considering New Historical Theory, Tyson explains, is to think about the retelling of history itself: "...questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different...traditional historians ask, 'What happened?' and 'What does the event tell us about history?' (Tyson278).

New Historicism came into existence in 1982 partially reacting against existing theories based on linguistics but assimilating some of their finer aspects. In a sense, New Historicism was nothing but an extension of Post-Structuralist and Deconstructive way of thinking. It blurred traditional boundaries without establishing an authentic paradigm for the interpretation of literature. In the words of David Wellbrey. "New Historicism is an eclectic method that borrows concepts from Foucault, Geertz and Bakhtin and many others ... a hermeneutic of cultural process" (Berghahn 142). The concept of New Historicists viewing a literary text as a historical process was expressed with epigrammatic terseness by Montrose's 'the historicity of the text and the textuality of history.' This concept is a reaction against the New Criticism stand of text being autonomous and antithetical to his body. It also reacted against the notions of the post-structuralist that life rather is 'a free play' without a centre. This formulated new historicism's concept or the dialogic relation between history and literature.

According to New Historicists, Literary texts were part of historical processes and they were the result of social production. There could be no original moment of creation, only representation of a moment in history. This kind of representation was not to be confused with any form of mimetic theory or with romantic notions of original creativity. Rather it was a network of expressive acts, negotiations, among discursive practices and "Circulation of Social Energy" (Lodge 499). May Nwoye and Akachi Ezeigbo need to capture history as they employ reality to represent man's reality in their text. Both authors socio- cultural events and experiences furnished them allows them include issues of religion, morality and the dynamics of life in their novels *Fetters and Choices* and *Trafficked*.

In New Historicism studying the history reveals more about the text; studying the text reveals more about the history. Both May Nwoye and Akachi Ezeigbo *Fetters and Choices* and *Trafficked* delves into the act of human trafficking and the various ways its done. The New Historicist also acknowledges that his examination of literature is "tainted" by his own culture and environment which brings in the question whether both authors are feminists, since the study of both authors reveals the women at the receiving end of human trafficking(Itohan in *Fetters and Choices* and Nneoma in *Trafficked*) Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist concern is ostensibly overshadowed by other conflicts within the society which

rather require a collective investment on the part of both the male and female writers of African literary kinship (Dobbie 55).

New Historicism refers to the analysis of literature while taking a keen interest in the socio-cultural and historical events that are involved in building literary work as it assumes that every piece of literature is as a result of a historical event that created it. In fetters and choices, the social class and culture in which the Egodi's live in is depicted. They are portrayed as poverty stricken as they had little or no money to fend for themselves, which led to Madam Agnes pushing her daughter Itohan into volunteering to be trafficked to Italy.

The compound was small and the house looked like patches of baked cracked mud, the windows made of pieces of wood. The rain, the wind and the sunlight had taken their turn in battering the unprotected abode... a depressing symbol of poverty (7).

Also, in Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* Nneoma's leaves her Fiancé and family behind because she got tired of the whole traditional way of things and she believes she could elevate in the social class by wanting something better for herself other than staying with Ofomata who wanted to take his father's role and later retire to his father's lucrative palm oil business.

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, (Adimora-Ezeigbo 126-127)

Human trafficking is a clandestine activity involving an organised criminal gang with superlative networks starting from the countries of origin through the transit points to the destination countries. Human Traffickers now go for girls of 8-18 years. In 1998 girls, girls of 12 years were recruited and also 2003, girls of 12 years were recruited. At present, eight-year-old girls are being trafficked for sex and are in hot demand. In Nigeria, the journey for most traffickers and victims begins from Benin in Edo State to Kano or Kaduna. The victims are moved from Mali, Libya, Morocco, Algeria to Spain or Italy (Punch 33). Innocent children, women and men are lured into trafficking with the promise of foreign jobs, gifts, using fake passports and visas as bait. 'A 21-year-old girl from Khammam in India said she was working in a telephone booth when she was promised a good job in Hyderabad, when she boarded the train, she was

drugged and woke up in Maharashtra'. The use of Oath to seal the contract and a voodoo priest to initiate it is also part of the process. A rescued trafficked person during the International Conference on Human Trafficking and Foreign Policy held in Abuja Nigeria some years back revealed that a point at the desert, she had to drink her urine and not only her, she sold it to others who needed drink, because of lack of water. She explains how devastating the experience was and the 15 dead skulls of girls she saw on her way.

CONCLUSION

The two novels reflect that human trafficking is a new variant of slavery i.e. a mutation of the old slavery. This study posits that human trafficking is like re-inventing the wheel and considered modern day slavery as it has inherent features of old slavery like human degradation, the sale of human beings, servitude, sexual exploitation, cheap work etc. In situations like this, women's positions become precarious. The absence of their menfolk as the socially ordained 'protectors' exposes women to grave forms of harassment and abuse, but it also introduces a new order in which women become managers of the social system who not only contain the upheaval of slavery but also sustain the social order.

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