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Sex Trafficking: The Psychological and Psychosocial Implicatures in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the African nations that have had contacts with the western world. These relations have metamorphosed into the world's most dangerous trade - sex trafficking. Sex trafficking is a variant of human trafficking; and it is one of the current trends in African literature. It is a thriving industry in this 21st century, and as such, is highly organized and regulated. It is a trade that demeans the dignity of women, commodifies their bodies and puts tags on them. It thrives in coercion, lies, blackmails, suppression exploitation, and subjugation. The victims are mostly women and girls who are lured into travelling abroad for economic independence and economic reliefs from their countries occasioned by leadership ineptitude. Victims are sold and resold since they are the merchandise of the industry. The victims most times are hoodwinked into it; and consequently, they are dehumanised and traumatized, and thus regarded as expended creatures. This development has affected the way they are viewed, regarded, and placed in the society. This paper, therefore, highlights the psychological and psychosocial implicatures of the sex trade on the victims as portrayed by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and how to ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration in

the society. It also proffers ways in which sex trafficking and sex traffickers can be checkmated. It also proffers ways in which sex trafficking and sex traffickers can be checkmated. This work appropriates the sociological theory of structural functionalism to analyse the psychological and psychosocial implications of sex trafficking on the victims. Recommendations to prevent the perpetration of the malady and to ameliorate its devastating effects on the victims are also drawn.
Keywords: Sex trafficking, dehumanised, psychosocial, traumatised, psychological

Introduction

The issue of sex trafficking is one of the main currents in African literature. It is a modern day form of slavery in which women are used as /commodities. Sex trafficking is the exploitation of women and children either within national or across international borders with intention of subjecting them to forced sex work. It is characterised by the exchange of sex, especially for goods and money, whereby someone (the objectified) is left sexually exploited. Sex trafficking involves commercial and sexual exploitation which includes pornography, prostitution and trafficking in women and girls. The sex trade is highly regulated and complex in nature with intricate criminal networks all over the world. Whereas sex trafficking such as street prostitution is highly visible, many trafficked victims are unseen but operating from unsuspected or unmarked brothels or neighbourhood.

The traffickers may operate from private or public location such as massage palours, spas and strip clubs. Adult women make up the bulk of sex trafficked victims followed by girl children. Sometimes men and boys are trafficked into the sex industry; but the percentage of the men and he boys is very insignificant. Victims of sex trafficking are often tortured in the hands of their traffickers/exploiters. They are beaten, drugged and raped, as the case may be, to extract absolute submission, dependence and

obedience from them in order to delete any thought of escape or freedom from their minds. The torturers do this to fulfill the saying that "the more broken a slave's spirit was, the more acceptable she was of the life of a slave" (Siddharth, 2009:1).

Sex trade is a global trade and considered a thriving one as it makes the operators economically well off. The victims are suppressed, subjugated and tortured since this practice helps them to control their victims, and thus bestows relevance on the agencies. Nadaswaran Shalini (2014:16) corroborates that "sex trade provides a lucrative business because in most cases the acquisition of the supplied labour is free as victims are often kidnapped women forced to work in the trade."

As a trade with international link and complicated networks, it tries to remain significant by ensuring the continued enslavement of the victims. Once they are trapped into the trade, they are forced to remain in perpetual enslavement. Sex trafficking, therefore, is an efficient, sophisticated business of modern slavery with powerful networks all over the world with a cabal that fights for its survival by resisting any form of insubordination from the victims.

Nigeria, as a member of comity of nations, is profusely involved in this organized crime against humanity. The country serves as a veritable recruitment ground for sex workers. Ezechi Onyerionwu (2015:7b) asserts that "…it is a strong and strategic base for the formidable mafia operations which specialise in trafficking young girls to Europe and other parts of the world for the purpose of prostitution."

The reason for Nigeria's large scale participation in this inhuman trade is in tandem with the "perennially embattled socio-economic process, whose devastation has been serially orchestrated by Nigeria's history of uninspiring leadership." (Onyerionwu 2015b:8) Consequently, this situation ushered in the emigration of

the vibrant and productive population of the country to Europe and the Americas since they could not envision economic survival within her shores. Gingered by this psychosocial problem, dubious men and women devised means of profiting from the circumstance that has bedevilled the country by forming what has turned out to be the 21st century world's most dreaded criminal organisation – Sex- trafficking gang.

Indeed, sex trafficking enjoys a substantial socio-political and deep interest of powerful patrons. The organizational level of the operational networks of this burgeoning trade, again, shows that it has erected a formidable economy for itself that any threat to its sustenance is met with stiff, firm, and even deadly resistance.

Nigeria, a prominent literary giant, has not been found wanting in her role in representing the menace of sex trafficking, fictionally. The country enjoys a dominant profile in African literature coupled with her interest in the "globalization" of African literature with the emergence of the global age. Abiola, Irele (2001:212) acquiesces that African literature specializes in "expressing the tension set up in our modern awareness of the varied and often contradictory elements of the collective experience…." Lucien Goldmann (1975:59) asserts that an intense societal anomaly such as sex trafficking is "particularly favourably to the birth of great works of art and of literature because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of great widening of affective and intellectual horizons that they provoke" This is say that a topical issue as sex trafficking provides literary writers with enormous problems to write on. Markedly, Nigerian literary writers, therefore, have been deeply involved with this subject and have played a leading role in this new world predicament.

In the Nigerian sex trafficking oeuvre, are works like Ifeoma Chinweuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2009), Ikechukwu Asika's

Tamara (2013), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) which won the coveted NLNG Prize for Literature in 2012, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale,* among others. Among these writers, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo has given us

> ...a nuanced understanding on the business of sex trafficking highlighting the intricate movements of transnational criminal networks, the horrors faced by women who are trafficked and their transcendence into empowerment seen in their successful attempts of escape into freedom as well as their renegotiation back into society" (Shalini,2014: 166).

There is a growing fiercer global war against sex trafficking every passing day, especially, as the victims are resisting it and subsequently transcending it economically, psychologically, physically and so on,.

Governments, non-governmental outfits, world organisations, international security agencies and corporate bodies, like, Adimora-Ezeigbo, are joining the battle to curb the menace of sex trafficking. In fact, this war against sex trafficking, "requires much more than declarations by world bodies, proclamations, by national government and admonitions by religious leaders. The response to a global crime this organised has to be strategic, investigative, and intelligence-oriented to be defeated." (Onyerionwu 2015:9a) The Nigerian literary writers' accomplishment is remarkable and their contribution has been recognised in the process of globalization.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism is a sociological theory that portrays the society as a complex system with different components that operate unanimously to achieve stability and order. The major theorists and exponents of this theory include Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), Robert K. Merton

(1910-2003) and Radcliff-Brown (1881-1955). Other early influences and proponents include Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Auguste Comte, Bronislaw Malinowski, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore. Abraham, R.G (2018:1) sees structural functionalism as "the theory that emphasises forms and social structures in terms of the function of institutions and customs for the sustenance of the social system". These institutions include family, government, religion, education, polity which as social institutions exist to provide social needs of the society. Each institution performs specific role that facilitates the maintenance of unity, stability, and order in the society.

The theory also maintains that the government is one of the significant structures in the society that is expected to make people-oriented economic policies that are capable of guaranteeing economic independence of the masses.. The inabilities of the government and other stakeholders in the society to provide economic comfortability for the masses facilitate the promotion of the operation of sex traffickers and the sustained trafficking of the youth, especially, women and girls. Where the different parts of the society fail to perform their distinct responsibility, a vice like sex trafficking becomes a norm. To this, Uwatt and Onugba (n.p:22) say:

> The functionality of any society is based on the independence and mutual dependence of component parts of society which is made up of: the population, culture, material products, social organizations and social institutions. A structurally functional society works towards harnessing its resources both natural and its human capital for the good of all its members. Unlike a functional society, a dysfunctional society works for interest of a few at the detriment of the masses.

Every component part of the society is expected to contribute their quota and operate interdependently with others for the smooth

running of the society for order and equilibrium. Hence, Uwatt and Onugba (n.y 22) still maintain that "The structural functionalism as a theory is anchored on the interconnectivity and interdependence of the social structures."

Sex Trafficking: Psychological and Psychosocial Implicatures in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

In *Trafficked* (2008), Adimora-Ezeigbo expresses the experiences of two women – Nneoma and Efe – who are hoodwinked into fake job opportunities and economic freedom abroad. Nneoma a graduate and a qualified teacher, and, Efe a trained teacher fall for the traffickers even though they are literate. They fall for the traffickers as a result of the manner and length they (traffickers) could go to convince or prove their legitimacy to their victims. Nneoma is promised a teaching job in a school, even as "they (showed) us pictures of the schools where we'll be teaching and gave us appointment letters signed by people with English names." (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2007:127)

Efe on her part "saw an advertisement in a newspaper…asking young men and women who wished to work abroad to come to a certain address to be interviewed" (98-9). Their travel documents are procured and shown to them, albeit not given to them, to prove the authenticity of the whole arrangement. It is then shocking to them when they discovered, to their dismay, that they have been trafficked; instead of teaching in a school and working as promised, they are sold and resold as sex slaves. Efe recounts her ordeal thus:

> I was sold to a woman called Madam Gold, a Nigerian. She was vicious. She used us shamelessly, made us walk the streets every night…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 (99-100).

Nneoma narrates:

> So I walk the streets of Rome for Madam Dollar for three years… There is no hope for escape… Baron has bought me from Madam Dollar… Instead of putting me on the street, he brings men home to the flat. Baron is a sadist. He rapes me 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 (131-2).

Both experiences are horrendous and nightmarish. Even when they escape from their traffickers, arrested and deported to Nigeria, "their emotional state often has to do with brokenness, hurt, fear" (Shalini 2014: 169) and stigmatization. Their experiences hamper their emotional freedom, and make them recoil to themselves. One of the fallouts of sex trafficking is that the trafficked are looked down upon as the dregs of the society. They are humiliated and subjected to all manner of emotional torture. The heinous experience of the sex trafficked includes physical assaults Nneoma.recalls:

> I sometimes refuse to co-operate with the customers, especially when they demand positions I find despicable or when they refuse to use a condom or make one of the nasty demands… When I am difficult, the men beat me and throw me out of their cars or kick me out of wherever they have taken me – sometimes a car park or a field or public garden. When this happens, I go home with little or no money. Madam raves at me, and Captain beats me up… (129).

This treatment contributes to reducing her to a psychological wreck. Efe attests to the treatment meted out to them when she

concurred to being called names: “They called us whores, yet they come to us” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 2007: 130).

Even more inhuman is the fact that the traffickers entrap them and subject them to an indefinite debt repayment. The traffickers make escape impossible by starving the victims of money. According to Nneoma,, “They always claimed I would get no money of my own until I had paid my debt” (133). Victims are subjected to perpetual enslavement as the person is sold and resold within the enterprise to continue to satisfy the sexual needs of the new owner as well as generate revenue as she extends her services to others. Therefore, help and freedom of the victims are illusory:

> Baron sends the other girls to brothels and keeps me in his flat. Instead of putting me on the street, he brings men to the flat. Baron is a sadist. He rapes and beats me. I refuse when customers demand oral or anal sex and insist that they use condoms and I’m sometimes assaulted for this. Baron locks me up in the flat, and does not allow me to go out except when he takes me with him (132).

At the deportation of Nneoma and Efe, they are rehabilitated to facilitate their absorption/reintegration into the society. They learn tailoring skills and hair dressing respectively to ensure economic independence. Efe thus becomes engaged to be married while Nneoma is admitted in the university to get a degree. They, therefore, become totally alert as shown by Efe when she confronts Fyneface who is encouraging relationships with her in order to re-traffick her.

International sex trade as an enterprise makes the victims, who are mostly females, undergo nightmarish psychological and psychosocial problems in the society. Nneoma decries “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" (129). Continuing, she states "sometimes, while we are standing in the red light area where other prostitutes line up, youths come shouting, *Puta! Puta!* At such moments, I am completely overwhelmed by shame" (130). Prostitution is a vice which the society frowns at. Persons, especially women who engage in it are regarded as societal misfits and morally degenerated beings who are not supposed to be associated with. Hence, they are treated as lepers or outcasts. The society therefore, abhors prostitution and those who engage in it.

This feeling of shame completely strips Nneoma of any self-esteem she may have had as a human. She winces with shame whenever the word sex trafficking is mentioned. The society looks down and denigrates them, as shown by the officers that bring them back to the country, "Shame on you," one of the officers taunted. "Go and join the rest of the scum who flew in from Rome a few minutes before you" (17). "Look at them" another put in. "What disgrace to the country" (17). People disparage and cast aspersions on them: "Ah, here are the returnee prostitutes from Italy. Shameless girls" (22).

Granted some girls may have known and accepted to prostitute abroad, but the reverse is the case with Nneoma and Efe. They are deceived with promises of job abroad. But the society does not know that sex trafficking has taken a new dimension. Because she has not opted for prostitution and mindful of the way prostitutes are regarded in the society, Nneoma "cocooned in the middle of the crowd of deportees, bent on maintaining anonymity, she climbed into the bus, and exhaled the air of shame and anger that well up" (23). They are embarrassed and self-conscious which forces them to hide their faces to avoid recognition since "people are saying that you girls are disgrace to your families and to Nigeria" (18). Given the national import of sex trafficking, it

attracts national interest and attention. Hence, when the trafficked girls are deported most of them tried to hide their faces.
Realising the deportation saga would attract public interest, Nneoma tries to avoid public glare:

> Nneoma…hurried away, shielding her face. The deportation would be reported in the newspapers and shown on local and national television. She gritted her teeth, praying that her face would not appear in newspapers or on television. How terrible and shameful it would be, she thought, if her family saw her in the midst of this vilified gang of deported women (19).

Nneoma refrains from socializing to prevent her from being recognized as a prostitute. She avoids contacts with people she knows, including Ofomata, the man her family and his agree that they would marry each other, and especially, after her long disappearance and people could easily deduce that she is among the trafficked. Nneoma never wanted to be a prostitute, but she is forced to become one. She prefers any job to prostitution; hence, after her escape from Baron, she accepts a cleaning job. Even though the pay is small, "she was grateful to be doing something less demeaning and humiliating than walking the streets or living in a flat where she was a sex object for every male" (159). She represses any thought that would remind her of the life she lived as a sex slave and thus prefers loss of memory in order to forget her ordeal.

Nneoma has hoped that securing a job after her rehabilitation process would give her the economic independence and security she desperately needs. The job would have granted her life the desired stability she envisions. So,

> She thought that the more stable she managed to make her life, the more readily her humiliation would be masked or even obliterated. She was in

> the process of reinventing herself. Her past was her own business. In the present, she could legitimately claim she has a job as a professional tailor in the best tailoring workshop in Lagos and introduce herself as a prospective graduate of the best university of technology in the country (239).

`But this dream is shattered when the journalist who wanted to interview her on the day of her deportation is able to recognize her at Chief Amadi's Asampete Cream Launch. Discovering Nneoma in Chief Amadi's employ, the journalist discloses Nneoma's identity to the Chief who does not demand for any explanation to ascertain why Nneoma becomes a prostitute, because sex trafficking is criminal, the society does not approve of it as a legitimate source of livelihood and sustenance; it is passionately opposed whether one is forcefully or ignorantly recruited. Hence, even though, Chief acknowledges the qualities inherent in Nneoma, as a person, he goes on to terminate her job. He expounds:

> You are a good worker and a talented tailor: no one can deny all that. But I can't keep someone with your background here. So I'm terminating your appointment with immediate effect. The month is almost ended, and I have asked the cashier to pay you a month's salary and another month's wages in lieu of notice. You may go (273).

To him, Nneoma's continued presence in his employ could jeopardize his business, finance and reputation. Nneoma's attempt to become a responsible citizen again is resisted due to her involvement in sex trafficking irrespective of the good plans she has.. In spite of her effort to shirk her involvement in sex trafficking, her personality as an ex-prostitute continue to frustrate her efforts to become a responsible citizen:

: She would be going to university in October. The loss of her job could be seen as simplifying things

> for her. She would have had to resign in a month or two anyway. But that didn't take away the humiliation she had has to suffer. Chief Amadi had called her a prostitute. That had hurt badly (280).

Nneoma could not come to terms with the fact that she is an ex-prostitute. Thus, any time she is addressed as one it pains her deeply. "Shame shot through her like an arrow." (55) The emotional trauma is overwhelming and has the tendency to completely annihilate. She is stigmatized, brutalized, assaulted, humiliated, abused and the memories of what she suffered haunt her.

The negative perception of sex trafficking on the trafficked victims in the society forces Nneoma to conceal her identity as a deported sex slave, especially from those who know her. She pleads with Dr Chindo not to reveal her true identity to Ofomata: "Agitated, Nneoma took a pen and a piece of paper from her handbag and wrote: Never to tell anyone of what happened to me in Europe. She gave it to Chindo while Ofomata looked on mystified" (310). Her phobia is immanent in the fact that should Ofomata discover her new identity, he could jettison the idea of marrying her even if "she felt sure this man would take her back, knowing her for who she was" (311). Nneoma strives to reinvent herself into the society, but her effort is stifled by people. This is to confirm the level of negativity to which the society view and regard sex trafficking.

Truly, sex trafficking is a dangerous enterprise that emasculates the victims and enriches the culprits; and its adverse effects are better forgotten than remembered. It turns the victims to psychological wrecks. Nneoma becomes a shadow of her former vivacious self. Socially, they are seen as misfits and the dregs of the society. Nneoma dreads appearing in the public to avoid recognition from people she knows and also avoids relationships. In fact, they are considered social outcasts; nobody wants to associate with them because of their background. Every manner of

negativity is attached to them because they are viewed as 'shameless', 'disgraceful' and 'cursedly' to themselves and their country. They are vilified and treated with contempt with absolute disregard to the condition that leads to their trafficking. And more painfully is that the society does not give them the opportunity to reinvent themselves but throws their predicament to their faces and make their wounds bleed afresh all the time as shown in *Trafficked*.

Way Forward

It is an indisputable fact that one could become a prostitute ignorantly as shown by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008). Sadly, the society is not interested in how one is trafficked, to them, sex trade is condemnable. However one's involvement in sex-trafficking, an international network, smears the image of the country and the victims concerned.

The government should improve the social, political, and economic conditions of the nation to forestall its productive population from being made willing prey for these traffickers abroad. The Nigerian government should help to curb the excesses of these traffickers by formulating policies that would specify punishments that would hamper their continued existence, by impeding their activities, and thus, eradicate them. The legislators should make laws that could spell out stringent punitive measures against sex traffickers in order to deter or obliterate their corporate existence.

Again, the government should sponsor sensitization seminars, workshops, and conferences in primary, secondary and institutions of higher learning to create awareness to the nefarious activities of these traffickers in the society. It is wise to catch them young instead of making frantic effort to extract them from the grips of the traffickers when they strike.

Also the media should assist in exposing the antics and operational devices of these fraudulent individuals by engaging in campaigns, using jingles on radio and TV and other communication channels to inform and enlighten the masses. Moreover, for efficacy, the media should employ mother tongue and pidgin as modes of communication in order to reach wider population.

It is imperative to keep people informed about the *modus operandi* of the traffickers who are able to outwit the literate, not to talk of the illiterates in the society as exemplified by Nneoma and Efe. The media should take their campaigns to the grassroots where most of the parents of the trafficked are, to make them aware of the dangers their children face in the hands of these traffickers who pose as messiah to their economic woes. Parents should be enlightened on how the people who volunteer to give their female children job abroad actually turn them to prostitutes.

In fact, the media should evoke sympathy and understanding for the trafficked through their campaigns by specifying the traffickers' modes of recruitment. They should make people stop humiliating, stigmatizing, abusing or harassing them in the society as a result of their plight. They should help reintegrate them in the society by urging employers of labour to recruit them and not discriminate against them.

Most importantly, skill acquisition centres should be set up by government and other stakeholders to facilitate their integration in the society, and foster their economic independence. Yet again, the centres would guard them against falling prey to employers of labour who may know their background and attempt to use same to blackmail them into making them accept sexual advances from them, face rejection, or sack them as the case may be. Doctors and psychologists could also be contracted in the centres to counsel them on how to cope with some psychological and

psychosocial problems which they would encounter in the society and thereby speed up their healing process.

Non-governmental organisations should assist the government to fight these traffickers by ensuring that cases reported to them are made public, perpetrators prosecuted and punished. The social media – Facebook, Whatsapp, X (FormerlyTwitter), Instagram, YouTube among others –should assist to curb the menace of these traffickers by exposing them.

This writer is of the opinion that since the issues of sex trafficking and sex trafficked victims are dicey in the society; journalists should be encouraged to make positive reportage of the high profiled cases to protect the country and the victims; and aid their smooth reintegration process into the society.

Conclusion

Adimora-Ezeigbo has contributed to the Nigerian literary progress by exposing one of the offshoots of Nigeria's contact with the world – sex trafficking. Besides, she portrays other sub-themes like tradition and modernity, feminist reassertions, academy corruption and government failure in providing basic amenities for the governed, among others have attempted to retell one of the contentious issues of the 21st century world.

Corroborating, Ezechi Onyerionwu (2015a:6) says:

> Nigeria writers have arguably been most prodigious in meeting the responsibility of "narrativizing" the reality of one of the most teething socio-political troubles of the 21st century world. Perhaps this is a price that the national literature has to pay for Nigeria's leading role in a new world predicament. It could be contended that the considerable literary profile that sex trafficking receives from Nigerian

literature constitutes an alternative contribution to the global war on it.

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo while condemning sex trafficking tries to expose its attendant psychological and psychosocial implications on the victims as exemplified by Nneoma and Efe. She attempts to inform the society on the dangers of sex trafficking; the presence of sex traffickers and the different antics they employ to lure their victims. Through her work, *Trafficked*, she gives an exposé on the negativity which the society attaches to sex trafficking. She strives to alert the society on the need for safety consciousness and spur them into assessing persons they come in contact with.

In short, she admonishes parents by urging them to be careful of whom they give out their children to, especially those who approach them on the guise of offering them job opportunity abroad; and alert young girls to be wary of how they accept job offers from bogus advertisements and offers of employment. Moreover, she seems to blame the government for not living up to its duty by not providing enough assistance to the masses economically, socially, psychologically and politically which thereby plunge them into abject poverty, insecurity amongst others .

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