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Body as Capital: Construing Experiential Knowledge of Prostitution and Sex Slavery in Some Postcolonial African Literature

ABSTRACT. Previous studies on prostitution and sex slavery in African literature have focused chiefly on the thematic concerns of the novels such as the moral dimensions of the act but none of the studies has explored the role of language as a form of representation that enables the reader to infer the psychological conditions and attitudes of discourse participants either as victims of prostitution and sex slavery or as active agents in the sustenance of the act. Working within the systemic linguistic orientation and insights from the notion of phenomenistic construal, therefore, this study explores the linguistic representation of the inner feelings and attitudes of victims of sex slavery and prostitution in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*. The texts under study represent sex slavery and prostitution as forms of physical and mental violence against the victims of the acts and a gross violation of their humanness.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic Construal, Prostitution, Sex Slavery, Experiential Knowledge, African Literature

Introduction

Literature, like any other art form, functions as a system of representation. It enables the writer to use the resources of language to represent things, ideas and relations or state of affairs in real and imaginary worlds. To Eco "Language goes where it wants to but is sensitive to the suggestions of literature... By helping to create language, literature creates a sense of identity and community" (Eco, 2002, p. 3). Language functions as the bricks with which the speaker/writer constructs and reconstructs their vision of the universe while literature, through the instrumentality of language, enables the artist to give form and shape to their imaginations. This explains the place of language in the construction and interpretation of literary discourses. The written work of art as a semiotic form attracts diverse interpretations of the realities or

illusions that a writer may have imbued it with. In the words of Eco “Literary works encourage freedom of interpretation, because they offer us a discourse that has many layers of reading and place before us the ambiguities of language and of real life” (Eco, 2002, p. 4).

The critics of African literature have approached its thematic concerns through different theoretical orientations such as sociological cum Marxist lenses, structuralist/post-structuralist perspectives, discourse-stylistic standpoints, psychoanalytical frameworks among several others. Some of the major concerns of African literature include cultural nationalism which can be found in works such as Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. Themes of postcolonial disillusionment can be found in the works of Ayi Kwei Armah, Meja Wangi, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, among others. Female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye and Zainab Alkali expose the negative sides of patriarchy in their fiction and imply the need for gender equality in Africa. Writers such as Femi Osofisan, Kola omotosho, Niyi Osundare, Festus Iyayi and Ben Okri are radical in their exposition of post-colonial disillusionment, particularly the immense corruption associated with military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s.

Most African writers of the 21st century such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Ifeanyi Ajaegbo, Kaine Agary, Chiemeka Garricks, and so many others are concerned with the many challenges that face the Nigerian and African youth and how they struggle to come to terms with such challenges. Issues such as emigration to the West in search of better social conditions, sex trafficking, sex slavery, prostitution, environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration and exploitation, militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria among others have occupied the attention of some of these writers. Consequently, the critics of modern African literature can and have used theoretical methods such as eco criticism, psychoanalysis, critical discourse analysis, etc. to explore the thematic concerns of the writers.

Literature Review and Theoretical Considerations

Several African critics have examined the literary representations of domestic and international prostitution, sex slavery and sex trafficking in African literature. Some of the recent studies include Nwahunanya’s (2011) thematic consideration of the image of prostitution in postcolo-

nial African literature; Kamalu and Ejezie's (2016) linguistic study of ideational representation of prostitution and social meaning in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*; and Kamalu's study of prostitution and sex slavery as part of the diasporic experience of African women in Europe and America. The present study is therefore an extension of the linguistic exploration of the literary representation of the social experiences of African women as victims of sex trafficking, sex slavery and prostitution. In particular, it is more of a "linguistic exploration of suffering" in the text under study (Kamalu, 2018, p. 7). Zoe Norridge in his *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* laments that a sensation (suffering and/or pain) which is so pervasive in African writing is relatively understudied in African literary criticism (Norridge, 2013, p. 3). To him, "one reason for this caution stems from the long-standing ubiquity of images of African distress in international media. Many critics perceive the topic of literary pain narratives as yet another homogenizing western stereotype of Africa as an 'underdeveloped' nexus of violence and death" (Norridge, 2013, p. 3-4). Based on the foregoing assumption, Norridge cautions critics of African literature thus:

To ignore the representations of pain in African literature, representations that provide rich and varied source for academic literary reflection, seems to be the greater mistake that may indeed be read as "neocolonial" in the sense that it forms yet another silencing of suffering (Norridge, 2013, p. 4).

Norridge urges African critics not to shy away from or ignore engaging in critical analysis of literary representations of pain or suffering as that may appear tantamount to denying its existence. Reporting how individuals and groups cope with the phenomenon of suffering is what Trachtenberg in *The Book of Calamities* calls giving meaning to suffering. According to him, "suffering may not inherently mean anything, but I believe that giving it meaning is the only way people can escape being ultimately destroyed by it" (Trachtenberg, 2008, p. 14). He explores suffering as a spiritual phenomenon, a condition that afflicts the spirit as well as the body (Trachtenberg, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, Norridge explores pain or suffering as both emotion and sensation and literary representations as modes for the depictions of suffering. He looks at the physical and emotional complexities of living with severe wounding. According to Norridge, "...pain goes beyond the extremes of agony and is experienced on a daily basis with many featured faces" (Norridge, 2013, p. 7) and there exists "fluid boundaries between mental and physical suffering"

(Norridge, 2013, p. 10). This implies that pain or suffering is pervasive, multifaceted and complex in nature. The systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach of M.A. K. Halliday which this study adopts as its main theoretical anchor enables us to describe the mental and physical sufferings of victims of sex trafficking and sex slavery in the novels selected for consideration. This study considers the harsh experiences of victims of the trade as instantiations of pain or suffering.

The notion of experiential meaning in linguistics emanates from M.A.K. Halliday's configuration of ideational metafunctions of language. The concept of ideation itself proceeds from the assumption by Halliday that the resources of language enable us to construe our experiences. Halliday and Matthiessen argue that "there is no ordering of experience other than the ordering given to it by language. We could in fact define experience in linguistic terms: *experience is the reality that we construe for ourselves by means of language*" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 3). This implies that it is only through the instrumentality of language (written, spoken, pictorial or gestural) that we as humans can construe or express our experiences of the world that is around us and inside our heads. Halliday and Matthiessen contend that experience is usually thought of as **knowledge** but note that experience in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is not treated as knowing but as **meaning**; and hence as something that is construed in language. Thus, SFL is concerned with the construal of human experience as a semantic system; (and) since language plays the central role not only in storing and exchanging experience but also in construing it—experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 1). Halliday and Matthiessen further observe that all knowledge is constituted in semiotic systems, with language as the most central; and all such representations of knowledge are constructed from language in the first place (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 3).

Halliday and Matthiessen consider the metafunctions as modes of meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 511). They argue that language is a system for creating meaning; and that its meaning potential has evolved around three motifs—the "metafunctions" of ideational, interpersonal and textual, with the ideational in turn comprising an experiential component (an expression of the user's experience of his real world); and a logical (an expression of the language user's experience of the internal world of his own consciousness) component. Ideational metafunction is about the natural world in the broadest sense of it. It is concerned with "ideation", the resources for construing our experiences

of the world around us and inside us. This involves the use of language to represent things, ideas and relations or state of affairs. According to Haynes, "It is this function which allows us to label things in a situation, to indicate categories and connections among them, and to show more abstract relations such as negation and causation" (Haynes, 1992, p. 23). For Martin and Rose, ideation "focuses on the 'content' of a discourse: what kinds of activities are undertaken, and how participants in these activities are described, how they are classified and what they are composed of. Ideation is concerned with how our experience of 'reality', material and symbolic, is construed in discourse" (Martin & Rose, 2003, p. 66). Halliday and Matthiessen perceive the metafunctions as aspects of the grammar since the powerhouse of language lies in the grammar. According to them:

Ideationally, the grammar is a theory of human experience; it is our interpretation of all that goes on around us, and also inside ourselves. There are two parts to this: one the representation of the processes themselves, which we refer to as the "experiential"; the other the representation of the relations between one process and another, and it is this that we refer to as the "logical". The two together constitute the ideational metafunction, whereby language construes our experiential world. The word "construe" is used to suggest an intellectual construction—though one that, of course, we then use as a guide to action (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 511).

On the interpersonal metafunction of language, Halliday and Matthiessen state, "**interpersonally**, the grammar is not a theory but a way of doing; it is our construction of social relationships, both those that define society and our own place in it, and those that pertain to the immediate dialogic situation. This constitutes the "interpersonal" metafunction, whereby language constructs our social collectives and, thereby, our personal being. The word, "construct" is used to suggest a form of enactment—though something on which we inevitably build a theory, of ourselves and the various "others" to whom we relate" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 511). Language therefore enables its users to express their experiences of the world and their relationships with others in the human society. On the textual metafunction, Halliday and Matthiessen posit:

Textually, the grammar is the creating of information; it engenders discourse, the patterned forms of wording that constitute meaningful semiotic contexts. From one point of view, therefore, this "textual" metafunction has

an enabling force, since it is this that allows the other two to operate at all. But at the same time it brings into being a world of its own, a world that is constituted semiotically. With the textual metafunction language not only construes and enacts our reality but also becomes part of the reality that it is construing and enacting (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p. 512).

We can see the interconnectedness of the three metafunctions in the construction and construal of experiences and social relationships. However, our chief concern in this study is to examine how language as social semiotic enables language users in social interaction to construe their individual and collective experiences and relationships. Halliday views language as a resource essentially for construing human experiences. Working within the Hallidayan view of language, Sonderling observes:

In a fundamental way language makes it possible for us to understand and make sense of the world by providing us with words and meanings to name things and interpret the world, to represent it to our mind, talk about it and exchange information with other people. Our knowledge and experience of the world are words and meaning mediated by language. The way we organise and articulate our experiences is an interpretative process that takes place mainly in, and through, language... language stands between us and our world; by using words to describe objects in our world we re-present the world to our mind and such representation influences, shapes and also distorts our view of the world (Sonderling, 2009, p. 86).

Here, Sonderling presents language as a form of representation that enables its users to construe their experiences and relationships. Evans contends that language is more than words and phrases and disembodied sounds but rather the coming to life of social interaction where sentences may be incomplete, punctuated by voices of other or by gaps, silences, intonations, accents and accompanied by bodily gestures and facial movements. He points out that language is embodied and expresses ways of being in the world through the creation of meanings which relate to us in terms of identity (Evans, 2015, p. 3). Language therefore includes the spoken and written words, signs, semiotics, gestures and so on that enable us to express our experiences of the world and our social relationships with others. In the texts under consideration in this study, the resources of language enable us engage in linguistic exploration of suffering and pain (mental and physical) as forms of representation.

Construction of Experiential Meaning in *Beyond the Horizon*

It is through the vision of the protagonist of the novel, Mara, that we gain insight into the slavery and savagery associated with sex slavery and trafficking in the German city of Munich. She is a victim of betrayal and deceit by her husband, Akobi and his notorious and insensitive network of transcontinental sex traffickers who bring her to Europe as a bonded slave for their own economic advantage. The narrative opens with Mara's self-assessment of her physical and psychological state as a victim of sex slavery. The text below enables us to see how Mara perceives her social and physical condition as a bonded sex slave.

I am sitting staring painfully at an image. My image? No! What is left of what once used to be my image. And from my left and right, all about me, I keep hearing chuckles and pantings, wild bedspring creaks, screaming oohs and yelling aahs. They are coming from rooms that are the same as mine, rooms where the same things are done as they are in mine. And in all of them there are pretty women like myself, one in each room waiting to be used and abused by strange men (Darko, 1995, p. 1).

The resources of language enable Mara to construe her victimhood in vivid patterns. And it is through the instrumentality of language that we make inferences about how she **sees, thinks, feels** and **perceives** herself and her social, physical and psychological conditions in Munich. The predominant use of relational process (mainly **are** and **is**) and mental process (hearing) in the text above convey a state of being and the attitude of the narrator. They communicate the experiences of Mara and other women as victims of sex slavery. The imagery that is evoked in the narrative communicates a sense of helplessness on the part of Mara and the other women who have to wait helplessly in their rooms to be "used and abused by strange men." Even though Mara talks about her physical depreciation, using a metaphor that best suits the description of a distant other or distant sufferer "...an image", the interrogative (My image?) and the emphatic negation (No!) that follow reveal her suffering and despondency. She could not believe what is left of her once beautiful image as a result of being a victim of commercial sex abuse. The narrative implicitly invites the reader to make reasonable inferences about her physical, mental and psychological state. Thus, the pantings, the wild bedspring creaks and the screams that come from adjoining rooms (being occupied by other "pretty women" like Mara) cannot be taken as

an expression of excitement. They are expressions of pain, agony and suffering as recipients of abuse by the strange men that patronize them.

Mara's next self-appraisal validates the assumption that her physical depreciation equates her psychological decline. She confesses that:

I **feel** so very, very far away on my own. So friendless, isolated and cold... I **feel** so cold because this coldness I **feel** does not grip my body so much as it does my soul. It's deep inside me that **feels** this chilliness, from the dejected soul my body harbours, a soul grown old from too much use of its shelter. Yes! I've used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer. But that doesn't render me emotionless. I've still got lots of **feelings** in me, though sometimes I'm not sure if they aren't the wrong ones" (Darko, 1995, p. 1).

Mara is physically and psychologically isolated from the warmth of life. The coldness she feels emanates from her soul—a dejected soul, a suffering soul. This implies that the physical strains involved in being used and abused by strange men have taken their tolls on her mental and psychological conditions. This justifies Norridge's assertion that there exists "...fluid boundaries between mental and physical suffering" (Norridge, 2013, p. 10). She is framed as a dejected soul being harboured by an over-used and depreciated body. The feelings she has in her present situation as a bonded sex slave are "the wrong ones"—negative feelings. They are feelings that make tears build up in her eyes. She feels so depressed; according to her "...when I stare at what is left of me. They are blurring my vision and are slowly rolling down my face in an agonizing rhythm like the beating of the devil's own drum...ta...ta...ta.... Dropping down one after the other, painfully gradual, onto these two flabby, floppy drooping things I call my breasts, my tired graceless bosom. I fear what I see when I look at myself. I shiver..." (Darko, 1995, p. 2). The narrative reveals her feelings, pains and anguish as a result of the despicable and inhuman conditions she faces in Germany as a prostitute. Mental processes such as **fear** and **shiver** show her psychological state as a helpless victim in the hands of certain cabal of power that owns her life in Europe. Mara is afraid and shivers because of the uncertainties that await her in a country where does not have any form of legal existence. She realizes that she is at the mercy of a heartless husband and his cohorts whose only concern is to make material fortune out of her pains, suffering and misery.

Mara suffers a lot of physical and psychological violence in Germany as a sex slave. Rape and violent sex appear to be a norm in the trade.

Mara describes her first sex encounter with her husband, Akobi, as "...a clear case of domestic rape" (Darko, 1995, p. 84). According to her; "...I felt sudden sharp pain of Akobi's entry into me. He was brutal and over-fast with me, fast like he was reluctantly performing a duty, something he wouldn't have done if he had his way, but he must because he must..." (Darko, 1995, p. 84). She feels dehumanized that her husband could make love to her in the bathroom, within the earshot of his friend, Osey and his wife. Osey too makes love to his own wife in the bathroom while Mara is close by. In Akobi and Osey, sex and womanhood are degraded. The apparent lack of respect for the sanctity of sex and marriage by Akobi and Osey baffles Mara but it serves as a prelude to what awaits her in Germany. Akobi's actions foreshadow the violence Mara will encounter in the line of duty in the hands of her violent and weird but "...best payers" (Darko, 1995, p. 2). She talks about the "...hideous traces of bites and scratches all over my neck..." that extend "far beyond the back of my ears, several bruises and scars left generously there by the sadistic hands of my best spenders" (Darko, 1995, p. 2). She describes seeing such marks as a "misfortune" (Darko, 1995, p. 2) and fears and loathes the sight of them. The questions she poses at Osey's wife show her worries and anxieties about their stay in Germany. To the questions, "Are you happy? Truly happy? The way things are? The situation you are in?" (Darko, 1995, p. 85), she (Osey's wife) responds; "I don't know, Mara, I am not that sad but I am not happy either..." (Darko, 1995, p. 85). The interrogatives reveal her state of mind about the situation they are into. They show she is not happy with what coming to Germany has turned out to be for her and other African women in similar situations. Osey's wife tells Mara that "...our life here is hard, you know..." (Darko, 1995, p. 89). Mara suffers severe hardship, physical and psychological, in her quest to be free from Akobi and his group. She needs to work harder to buy her freedom from the cabal that controls and exploits her situation in Munich. Freedom for a sex slave like Mara means raising a huge sum of money "...to pay some German guy to marry me, so that I could get my resident papers" (Darko, 1995, p. 120). With the cooperation of Kaye, the proprietress of Peepy, Mara undergoes rapid reawakening. But the reawakening is not without a cost as Mara narrates below:

Taking on seven men a day was crucifying but I was aiming for certain amount of money, plenty of money, plenty money, and the sooner I raised it the better, since the longer the time, the greater the danger of Pompey finding

me out. When I wasn't sleeping with a man I was crouching over a bucket of steaming hot water diluted with camphor and alum. Sometimes the treatment left me with a numb vagina, so that I even feel nothing when the men were sleeping with me, but it was better than the pain. On top of it I was swallowing scores of pain killers and tranquillisers every day and taking drugs to keep me going (Darko, 1995, p. 120).

The actions being projected in the narrative above provide an insight into the physical and emotional sufferings Mara has to endure in order to survive in Germany. She undergoes different dimensions of sufferings and self-mortifications metaphorical framed as crucifixion. The notion of crucifixion captures the shameful and painful processes she goes through to raise sufficient funds to marry a German man in order to get a resident permit. Mara's experiences represent that of several other young African women who are victims of the deceit and exploitation of the transnational cabal of power that operates the sex trafficking and sex slavery network.

Experiential Representation of Prostitution and Sex Slavery in *Trafficked*

The experiences of the victims of sex trafficking and sex slavery in *Trafficked* are brought to us through individual recollections of such experiences and through flashback techniques. The reason for adopting such narrative style is that the story opens with the deportation of the young women from London and their arrival at Murtala Mohammed International Airport amidst humiliation and mockery by airport workers and other onlookers, and their eventual rehabilitation at Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development (OYCSD). The experiences of the victims come to us mainly through the lenses provided by Nneoma and Efe. It is through their personal but identical experiences that we gain insight into what happened to the ladies while in Italy and England as bonded commercial sex workers. Earlier on arrival as one of the "trafficked women and other deportees" (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 13). Nneoma provides a peep into her own psychological condition and mood, and that of other women as they arrive Nigeria in shame. The narrator informs that "...she glanced at the other girls and saw a mixture of fear, anger 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 hopelessness” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 12). Thus, the narrator uses emotive words such as **fear, anger, disappointment, shame** and **humiliation** to mirror their inner thoughts and feelings as trafficked persons. The cognitive projection of their emotions as deportees at the beginning of the narrative prepares the reader for a larger picture of their experiences in Europe prior to deportation.

The airport experience enables us to have a glimpse at what is going on in the mind of the deportees. The narrator informs that the questioning session at the airport “had been traumatic” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 14) for Nneoma. We are told of the **fear** and **panic** that rule her life as a hopeless victim of sex trafficking. The chief goal of the narrator is to project her mental and psychological state as a victim of sex trafficking and to show the psychological effect of the entire process on her and other victims. The narrator informs that “The horrors in Rome, the disorientation and savagery in London flat, the humiliation of arrest and detention plagued her mind” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 14). Cognitive expression such as **fear, panic, horrors, plague, her mind** and so on communicate a picture of a worried, disturbed and emotionally unstable person. This is a discursive form of depicting mental suffering. The narrator uses her psychological state to project the negative effects of sex trafficking and sex slavery on innocent victims of the acts. Nneoma is so haunted by her experience in Europe that she becomes a withdrawn and brooding individual. Efe’s advice to Nneoma gives us some insight into her feelings:

I know we’ve both been hurt. Terribly hurt. I see it in your movement, in your silence. I’m sure you also see it in me, however much I pretend all is well. Nneoma, you brood too much. You must let go and move on. I don’t know what happened to you, but it’s not healthy to be bitter, to punish yourself like this... Nneoma, we’re all broken inside...” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 97).

Nneoma and Efe are helpless victims of different degrees of violence and exploitation in Europe. Both women were deceived into believing that life in Europe was a lot better than life in Nigeria. The thread of the narrative reveals that the turnout of events in Europe, the direct opposite of their expectations, was responsible for the despondency of the young women. Efe confesses that “the experience nearly finished me” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 124). Nneoma and Efe’s experiences are

identical: Efe was **sold** to a vicious Nigerian woman, Madam Gold (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 99), while Nneoma was **sold** to another mean Nigerian woman, Madam Dollar (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 128) in Italy. Both ladies **resold** Efe and Nneoma to different pimps in Italy and England. The narrative shows that women are bought and sold as one would a commodity in the open market. The commodification of humans as articles of trade is a crucial part of the business. Efe informs that “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” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 100). Crucial to the social meaning of the discourse is the use of words such as “sold”, “slaving” and “my new owner” which communicate the ideology that Efe is a mere article of trade that can change hands at will between prospective dealers. The word “slaving” signifies the degree of suffering, exploitation and dehumanization she went through while in the service of Madam Gold. This apparent lack of respect for human dignity as well as the physical assault from the pimps and other customers is what Efe says nearly finished her while in the service of her owners. Nneoma’s recalls her experience as a human commodity thus:

In Italy I discovered I am trafficked. I have no say in the matter. There’s a woman called Madam Dollar—nothing comes between her and money. She **owns** us and the man, whom we learn call Captain, is her body guard. She keeps us as **prisoner** 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. As soon as we arrive, she **sells** my friend. I have not set eyes on her since” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 128–129).

The text above shows that Madam Dollar, just like Madam Gold, owns her slave women as one would own a piece of furniture. The notions of prisoner and hell communicate the ideation that Madam and her group have no regards for the dignity of the women under their service. Their chief interest is just to make money from the pains and sufferings of the women. We are informed that Madam Gold and Madam Dollar and their cohorts “**bought** women and **sold** them regularly as if they were merchandize” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 135). It is the feeling that they are owned by a certain cabal that does not have regard for their humanness that affects the women psychologically and emotionally. Norridge, drawing from Fanon’s work within the context of colonial project, asserts that “...in order to inflict suffering, those in power seek to deny

the essential humanity of the other” (Norridge, 2013, p. 8). Madam Gold and Madam Dollar appear not to recognize the essential humanity in their victims. Nneoma conveys her dilemma and helplessness in the circumstance she finds herself this way: “There is no hope of escape. I do not speak Italian. I know no one in the city. I fear the police like plagues as I don’t have valid documents” (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. 131). Expression such as **nohope, know no one, fear the police** show her psychological and emotional state as a helpless victim of sex slavery and sex trafficking. It is this mood that those who claim to own her life in Italy exploit to her disadvantage.

Linguistic Expression of Ideation in *Sarah House*

All the actions in *Sarah House*, unlike those in *Beyond the Horizon* and *Trafficked*, are set in the city of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Here, what obtains is a case of domestic sex slavery operated by Nigerians, with the connivance of both Nigerians and some foreigners but with Nigerian women as sole victims. Inhuman experiences such as deceit, psychological disorientation, commodification of humans, physical violence, rape, economic exploitation and so on that characterize transcontinental sex trafficking and slavery also obtain in the domestic pattern represented in the world of this novel. The narrative is a shocking revelation of the bizarre and inhuman practices that thrive in the city of Port Harcourt. The physical and psychological effects of the “work” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 23) make “the girls look(ed) lifeless and defeated” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 17). Nita informs that “...Tega walked into the room first, her steps unsteady on wobbly legs...Matti came in after Tega. She looked as tired. Beneath her left eye, a huge bruise nestled in the folded flesh” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 18). The use of the relational process “look” and attributions such as “wobbled” and “tired” early in the narrative is intended to communicate a lot about the physical and psychological state of the victims of the inhuman trade. It also foreshadows the type of life the girls will have to endure in their captivity. The narrative suggests that the girls are overworked, drained and maltreated in the process of meeting certain targets and expectations of their masters or owners.

Ajaegbo discursively frames the social experiences the girls endure in the line of duty as a form of slavery. Tega educates a naïve Nita on what life holds for them as captives as “...life of prostitutes. The life of

slaves. You do what they ask you do” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 40). The life of slavery that the girls are subjected to range from economic exploitation to diverse forms of physical assault such as being beaten, raped or killed as a form asserting authority and control. Tega captures their helplessness this way:

There is nothing we can do. We are locked up in this place and we cannot leave. We cannot run away. They take us to the place where the men wait for us. Sometimes they bring them here, but this rarely happens because they do not want the police to know about this place. Or about us. When the men finish with us, they do not pay us. They pay them. Even when the men make a mistake and pay us, Slim and Fatty or any of the others will be at hand to take the money from us (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 41).

Nita, the protagonist of the novel, contemplates suicide after being raped by a stranger organized by Slim and Fatty as a way of making her get “...comfortable with strangers” (p. 69). Slim and Fatty have to invite a professional rapist to teach Nita how to get comfortable with strangers because she resisted working as a prostitute for the group. She communicates her feelings thus: “I was beginning to **think** that the only way out of this mess was to kill myself. But how? No, I did not **feel** all right... But I **feel** like dying knowing that the other girls in the room had heard about me getting comfortable with strangers. I had just been raped and violated, my womanhood invaded. I did not **know** what to **think**” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 68–69). The experience being represented here is that of physical and mental pain of the victim of rape. Mental processes such as **think**, **feel** and **know** are used to provide an introspection into Nita’s psychological state as a helpless victim of rape. The actions in *Sarah House* intertextually tie with those in *Beyond the Horizon* and *Trafficked*. In *Sarah House* girls are bought and sold as commodities as in the two texts already discussed and the pattern of experience of the girls in *Sarah House* echo those of the young women in Darko and Ezeigbo’s novels.

Madam of Sarah House pronounced the girls as “Good products” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 89) after a thorough inspection of the human commodities presented to her by Slim and Fatty for purchase. “I **felt** like an animal being looked over before a **buyer** made an offer” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 89), is Nita’s own way of describing their individual and collective feelings as debased humans in the hands of their captors. Being inspected seems like a vital ingredient of the business. Nita informs that even

friends of their captors and other customers “...looked over us like **prized commodities** displayed for the benefit of **buyers**” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 140). The ideology that underlies the narrative implicates that the cabal of power that operates the sex trafficking network has no human feelings and make no distinction between business and human dignity. The metaphorical construction of the victims as animals or commodities is a discursive form of projecting their humanlessness in the estimation of their captors. The whole notion of buying and selling humans as commodities is a form of delegitimising the other and implicitly denying them their humanness. As Chilton points out, the extreme form of delegitimation “...is to deny the humanness of the other” (Chilton, 2004, p. 47). Madam explicitly expresses some form of self-legitimation and delegitimation of the other when she counters Nita’s resistance, “He **sold** you to me...I **paid** good money for you” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 156–157). The expression is not just to intimidate Nita but to also communicate the impression that she (Nita) is now one of Madam’s personal possessions since she has paid good money to have her.

Nita herself describes Madam as “...our new **owner**. Slim and Fatty had **sold** us to her” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 107). She further informs that “Madam had **paid** Slim and Fatty for us. She **owned** us now and could tell us to do whatever she wanted. She had **bought** us the way other people bought useful item at the market” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 109). Even though material processes have been predominantly used in the discourse they however give us an insight into how the victims feel as being perceived as commodities that people could purchase in the open market. This implied feeling of being so debased and dehumanized as subhuman is what disturbs the narrator. Madam, on her own, exudes enormous power of legitimation and dominance over the “good products” she purchased from Slim and Fatty. Nita informs that “Madam made it clear that **we are her possessions**. We did not make the rules here. We obeyed them” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 119). She is depicted as a beautiful but ruthless business woman who “...**bought** and **sold** people as if they were objects” (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 157). The metaphorical representation of humans as mere objects in the world of the narrative is intended to show the attitude of Madam and members of her group to human dignity. The victims who are bought and sold like objects or prized commodities are the objects of delegitimation in the hands of the cabal that owns them.

Ajaegbo tries in the novel to represent this form of dominance as modern day slavery that has both physical and emotional repercussions on its victims. The physical dominance manifests in diverse forms such as the violent and bizarre sex styles the girls are compelled to undergo in the hands of their partners. In one of the several such experiences the narrator constructs a graphic image of the physical exhaustion of the girls. "Miko came in first. She **shuffled** towards her bed and corner of the room... **Fatigue** was etched into every line and pore of her face...she **moved wearily** to her bed and **lowered** herself down" (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 101-102). As for Sele, she "**collapsed** against Tega's body... she cried out in pain as the supporting arms touched an injury we could not see... Sele's body was a **mass of bruises** and **burns**. Some of the injuries were minor. The others were open wounds oozing a clear white fluid mixed with blood. A thin film of sweat coated her brow" (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 103). Expressions such as **shuffled, fatigue, wearily, lowered, collapsed, injuries**, etc. communicate the degree of physical torture, with their emotional consequences, that the girls have to endure to work money for their owner, Madam. The narrator informs that Madam's bizarre sex culture is another source of pain on the girls. According to the narrator, "Madam used whips and belts. She did not burn and tear at her partners. Yet she was not better than Lothar. Pain is pain regardless of who inflicted it, when it was inflicted and how" (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 105). Madam and her ilk are apparently insensitive to the pain the girls have to go through in order to meet her material expectations. The physical and emotional pain makes Tega say to Nita; "I can't take this anymore" (Ajaegbo, 2013, p. 219). She tries to escape from captivity but is caught and murdered by the killer squad of Madam, Slim and Fatty.

Conclusion

It is always said that victims of pain and suffering are often denied the opportunity to speak or talk about their pain. Denying them the opportunity to talk about their experiences is also a denial of assertion of right to self-representation. Critical studies reveal that those who control power also control and manipulate discourse to their own advantage. However, some of the victims of pain and suffering we encounter in the novels studied expressed their feelings, attitude and provide insights into their condition within the narrative space allotted to them.

The resources of language enable users to construe their diverse experiences and social relations. Thus the ideational world of the victims of sex trafficking and sex slavery comes to us through the instrumentality of language. It is through their use of language that we encounter their physical and mental pain and suffering. Their physical and mental pain enable readers of the texts to perceive sex trafficking and sex slavery as evil.

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