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Human trafficking and the African woman: A critical study of Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

ABSTRACT. Globalization, gender inequality and poverty render African women vulnerable to trafficking; this is explored by Darko and Adimora-Ezeigbo in their novels. From the feminist perspective, this article analyzes the authors' portrayal of trafficking, factors and structures that sustain it, and the significance of the construction of self-narratives during victim's rehabilitation. It also proffers preventive strategies and effective avenues for victims' rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

KEYWORDS: gender inequality, African women, trafficking, self-narratives, rehabilitation, reintegration

Introduction

Trafficking in humans, especially women, has rapidly become one of the fastest growing criminal industries world-wide. Although many African nations have been adversely affected by this insidious modern-day slavery, a total comprehension of its magnitude and complexity still eludes many. Worse, the gravity of its impact, not only on victims, but the African society in its entirety, is yet to be realized.

The United Nations defines human trafficking thus:

> the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat of the use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, or the purpose of exploitation (United Nations, 2018, p. 1).

The trafficking of African women from countries such as Ghana and Nigeria to the West, and their subsequent dehumanization is, therefore, a great blow to feminists' fight for gender equality and women's rights. It is for this reason that women activists and writers are striving to put an end to this devastating problem. Ghanaian writer, Darko and her Nigerian contemporary, Adimora-Ezeigbo, have also lent their voices to this cause through their poignant works which reveal, through the trials of their female protagonists, their keen understanding of the complex nature of the trafficking of African women. Subsequently, these works have received much scholarly interest and critical attention.

Frias (2002, p. 8) in her study of *Beyond the horizon* emphasizes the focal point of the work which she identifies as its subversive portrayal and resistance of the objectification of "the black female body in Africa/Ghana, and in Europe/Germany, through prostitution and pornography". In consonance with Frias, Umezurike (2015) also identifies and explores, in his critical analysis of the work, the "realistic and haunting" representations of the sexual objectification of African women immigrants in Europe and "the degradation, and domination they have to go through in a male-driven society" (Umezurike, 2015, p. 293). He concludes that, understanding the fundamental objectification in the novel can best be achieved through the process of interpellation. Chasen (2010), however, focuses on tracing the interconnected roles played by globalization, colonialism and tradition in the trafficking of women and reveals that, an integral aspect of Darko's novel is the intersection between the "physical and psychological impacts of violence and forced prostitution on African women in the Diaspora" (Chasen, 2010, p. 4).

In his feminist reading of *Beyond the horizon*, however, Ugwanyi (2017, p. 62) recognizes the work as "a celebration of solidarity amongst women and the deconstruction of the avowed feministic biases in female writings in Africa", achieved through the subversion of male characters. For him, this is seemingly the only avenue through which the patriarchal systems instituted by men to subjugate women can be defeated. Ladele (2016, p. 141) also critically analyzes the sexualized effect of globalization on the restructuring of the identities and sexualities of the African woman through the protagonists of Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. She argues that through forced prostitution, the bodies of these women are re-colonized by European imperialism supported by indigenous patriarchal systems.

In her article on *Trafficked*, Fubara (2013, p. 8) identifies the trafficking of women as a form of slavery and violence against women and traces some of the causative factors to "the socio-political milieu of poverty, corruption and bad governance". However, her focus is limited to the style and techniques employed by Adimora-Ezeigbo to reveal the message of her narrative. Nadaswaran (2011) concurs with Fubara by identifying, in her critical study of *Trafficked*, neo-liberal policies as being responsible for the corruption and poverty in Nigeria, the by-product of which is the sexual trafficking of Nigerian women to various European countries. Nadaswaran (2011, p. 276) ventures a step further to analyze "the fundamental characteristics and resistance shown by the enslaved person's life" in the narrative.

From the foregoing, it is evident that existing studies on Darko's *Beyond the horizon* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* mostly focus on the causative factors of trafficking and the subsequent objectification of female victims in the novels without highlighting an integral aspect of their rehabilitation and reintegration into society which is the construction of self-narratives by the victims during the process of rehabilitation. This strategy, advocated by psychologists and postmodern feminists, is insightfully captured by both writers, with emphasis on its significant role in enabling the victims to regain control of their voices, bodies and lives. For this purpose, the feminist theory, with special reference to postmodern feminism, becomes a suitable framework against which the experiences of the female protagonists in both novels are analyzed.

One of the major achievements of feminists is making visible the patriarchal beliefs, norms, values and structures that reinforce gender inequality in society, resulting in the oppression and marginalization of women. As such, while women are rendered vulnerable in the gendered social order, men are privileged with power and authority through which they exercise control over women. In traditional African society, the socio-cultural conditioning of women forces them to conform to, rather than challenge these gendered practices, thereby reinforcing them.

The major goal of feminists is, therefore, to identify and destroy the oppressive systems that maintain gender inequality and encourage male domination, discrimination against women and what Lorber (2005, p. 14) refers to as "the excesses of men's power—violence, rapes, and sexual [as well as economic] exploitation of women". Feminists also advocate resistance to gender inequality through consciousness-raising

and activism, to challenge and destabilize the gendered social order, while emphasizing that women must make their voices heard and presence felt in the various structures of society through active participation and meaningful contributions.

Among feminists who strongly advocate a "degendering" of society are postmodern feminists who insist that this must "translate into everyday interaction which could be revolutionary enough" (Lorber, 2005, p. 17) to be successful.

Factors and structures responsible for the trafficking of African women

Several factors have been identified as being responsible for rendering the African woman vulnerable to trafficking. First is globalization which is responsible for demographic differences between developing African countries and the developed world. This has been reinforced by the patriarchal nature of the African society which systematically preys on and exploits the vulnerability of women and girls as a means of fulfilling its ideologies, making it very easy for them to become victims of trafficking.

With women culturally conditioned to accept the man as the superior being whose pride, needs, and happiness come first, and who must exert his authority in decision-making, many women have fallen prey to the exploitation of men. Also, gender inequities encouraged by patriarchal notions of the African woman, which directly or indirectly prescribe and control her roles in society, have created an imbalance in the socio-economic sphere where women have been largely deprived of opportunities for knowledge, self-improvement, individualism and actualization.

Mara, Darko's protagonist in *Beyond the horizon*, can be placed under the category above. Naïve and uneducated, she is culturally conditioned to regard her husband, Akobi, a clerk, as her lord and master. After all, his father had "bought her off very handsomely" (p. 7) which single-handedly reduces her to his "property" to do with as he pleases. Her duty is to obey his every word and put his happiness first. Burn (2005) gives further insight into this situation by observing thus:

> When people are thought of as commodities or property, they are diminished and dehumanized and do not have the power to make their own life

> choices. In many cultures, a female is property—first of her father and then of her husband. These men decide her fate and she is expected to obey. (Burn, 2005, p. 23)

This is Mara's fate. She has no say in the choice of her husband and from the following conversation between them, it is obvious that neither does her mother who breaks the 'good news' to her:

> 'Your father has found a husband for you,' she gasped, 'a good man!'
> 'Who is he,' I asked mother, 'Father's choice for me?'
> 'Oh, dear child,' mother said, 'you know your father would consider me rude if I disclosed him to you before he did.' (p. 4)

And so, from a father who exercises complete control over her life and would have very happily given her away "even for one goat" (p. 7) because of her suitor's status as the first educated man in their village, Mara is passed on to Akobi who expects her to "obey and worship" (p. 13) him as required by tradition.

Wilkinson (2017, p. 10) defines gender inequality as being "primarily about power […] [which] has an undeniable economic dimension". Right from the start of their marriage, Akobi asserts control over Mara physically, mentally, and economically because he is the man and, as the head of his family, tradition has allotted him power and authority over her. He moulds Mara to accept his every demand and controls their finances; even when he permits her to engage in business, it is to selfishly further his own end—have her use whatever she makes to sustain the home while he saves his income towards his travel abroad. As a good wife, Mara supports her husband's dream, believing its attainment will lift them out of poverty. Akobi successfully travels to Germany and, after two long years of silence, suddenly sends a letter requesting that she joins him (even though he has married Gitte, a German) to supposedly "keep house for [him]" (p. 51), leaving him free to earn enough money to ship home all the things he has acquired with his savings. As a dutiful wife, Mara obeys her husband's call and even incurs debts to support her travel to Germany which her husband arranges for selfish reasons.

The second factor responsible for the migration of women to Europe and other parts of the world is poverty. The poverty rate in African countries like Ghana and Nigeria, the preliminary settings of the novels under discussion, is very high due to the uneven spread of resources among the population. The harsh economic climate has left many fami-

lies wallowing in poverty due to unemployment or the lack of a proper source of income. The desperate need for employment and the quest for a better life has, inevitably, made migration to developed countries very attractive to many jobseekers. This is what lures Nneoma, Adimora-Ezeigbo's protagonist, to Europe.

Like Mara, Nneoma regards herself as one who can help better the lot of her poverty-stricken family. With a father whose gratuity remains unpaid several years after retirement, her family is plunged into dire economic straits and relocates to the village. Nneoma is unable to help in any way because years after completing her training as a teacher, she remains unemployed:

> Her mind went back to the year she completed her National Certificate of Education training. She couldn't find a job. There had been a time when trained teachers were guaranteed employment. But those days were over. Other students had the same experience, of assiduously looking for a job that was not forthcoming (p. 70).

The strain of family squabbles, poverty, and the belief that she is "the only source of relief and hope for a better life for [her family]" (p. 20) drive Nneoma to flee from home in search of a job. She recounts:

> 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 (p. 126).

Evidently, poverty and the unavailability of decent employment opportunities has created an enabling environment for traffickers to prey on women. Nneoma further narrates:

> In no time, [the sponsors] get passports and flight tickets for us, and keep them. They show us pictures of the schools where we'll be teaching and give us appointment letters signed by people with English names […]. We are six young women between the ages of seventeen and twenty (p. 127).

The third factor—an adverse political climate—manifests in the case of Efe, another female character in *Trafficked*, who suffers a similar fate as Nneoma after responding to a newspaper advert for men and women who wish to work abroad. Unlike Mara and Nneoma, Efe's desire to migrate stems from the need to escape the unconducive climate of the military regime in the country (Nigeria) at the time. She recounts:

> You know how people longed to leave the country, especially during the military regime [...] I responded to the advertisement [...] the office seemed perfectly normal. Quite a number of people were interviewed the same day. Some were rejected, but I was selected. None of the men who were interviewed was taken. That should have alerted me to danger, but I barely gave it a thought at the time (p. 99).

Evidently, Efe feels the need for a more comfortable and productive environment, conditions which she hopes to enjoy by migrating to Europe.

Fourthly, Kempadoo (1998, p. 10) observes that racial and ethnic profiling often exoticize African women which makes them desirable as objects for the fulfillment of western fantasies. This perception, therefore, encourages sex industries to support the trafficking of African women. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of African women being trafficked from African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria to Western countries.

Finally, many of the labour markets in the West have migration and immigration policies which are unfavourable to migrants from African countries. According to Soova (2015, p. 2), "current statistics show that the labour markets of EU member states are increasingly restrictive to third country migrant workers". For this reason, many young women, unable to meet the official requirements, opt for unofficial arrangements which render them vulnerable to the exploitation of multinational trafficking networks whose agents, according to Moorehead (2007, sec. 1, para 10) "dupe [them] into accepting offers of what they are told are lucrative and respectable jobs".

In *Trafficked*, Nneoma and Efe become victims of this sophisticated criminal industry which eases their way to Europe at the expense of their freedom and dignity. The genesis of Mara's trafficking in *Beyond the horizon* is different, having been planned and orchestrated by her husband who pays an agent to "smuggle" her into Germany. Mara recounts:

> My agent knew his way about in these things. He travelled regularly between Africa and Europe. Men paid him to smuggle their wives and girlfriends, who had no valid visas, into Europe, a very risky but lucrative business [...]. Akobi, for instance, had paid him his return trip to Europe, plus of course the cost of his labour. All he had to do was see me through emigration at home and through immigration in East Berlin (p. 57).

With the aid of corrupt officials who turn a blind eye and facilitate their business, these networks of traffickers thrive and prosper while

the lives of their victims are destroyed. Unlike Nneoma and Efe who are completely unaware of their plight until they cross borders, Mara becomes one of those women who had "knowingly availed themselves of trafficking networks in order to be smuggled into more prosperous nations in the hope of economic betterment" (Meyers, 2016, p. 4). In so doing, she becomes a pawn to her husband, Akobi.

Forms of trafficking

Two forms of trafficking highlighted in *Beyond the horizon* and *Trafficked* are involuntary domestic servitude and prostitution; both forms are tied to debt bondage. The International Organization for Migration's 2000 report (cited in Moorehead, 2007, sec. 1, para. 6) identifies trafficking as "the most menacing form of irregular migration due to its ever-increasing scale and complexity". Apart from forcing victims into involuntary domestic servitude and prostitution, these trafficking syndicates trap their victims in debt bondage which keeps them in their exploitative stranglehold.

Bhoola (2016) remarks that debt bondage, also known as bonded labour or debt slavery, "remains one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery in all regions of the world despite being banned in international law" (cited in the UN report on debt bondage, 2016, para. 1). Trafficking syndicates use agents to trap victims into debt bondage by paying their victims' travelling expenses. In *Trafficked*, Nneoma gives more insight into the technicalities of debt bondage when she narrates what happens after she and five other girls are recruited, and their travelling documents processed by the syndicate:

> They tell us we will have plenty of time to pay back our debts to the agency when we start earning money […]. The only thing that worries me is that we have to take an oath and they tell us the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of the agreement, disobey them or cut links without settling our debts (p. 128).

Efe goes through a similar process, the only difference being that, while Nneoma takes her oath with a Bible, Efe's oath is administered in a shrine (p. 128). The implication of the oaths is clear: not only are they regarded as binding, they will also attract spiritual punishment should

they be broken. Thus, both women effectively become the properties of their traffickers to do with as they please.

In *Beyond the horizon*, Mara faces a similar yet more complicated situation because the person she is indebted and bonded to is her husband. She narrates: "Akobi took the money I earned, as payment for the roof he and Gitte had provided over my head, for my food and transport, for the investment in my trip from home, and for the cost of setting me up for my coming big job" (p. 106).

Bhoola (2016) also observes that a power imbalance develops between the traffickers and their victims which renders the women even more vulnerable to human rights abuses. Inevitably, they end up earning very little income, if any, for the value of the work they do(cited in UN report on dept bondage, 2016, para. 6). They also work on terms set by the traffickers that are "rarely made explicit to the bonded person, who may be passed with their debt from owner to owner" (Bindman, 1998, p. 67) as experienced by Nneoma when she is sold to Baron who takes her to Britain where her exploitation continues (p. 132).

Another trap used by the traffickers to reinforce their control over their victims is the confiscation of their travel documents which leaves all the women—Nneoma, Efe and Mara—completely at the mercy of their traffickers. It becomes very easy to take advantage of their vulnerability to abuse them physically and psychologically to keep them in line.

In *Beyond the horizon*, Mara is first placed in domestic servitude by her husband. She recounts:

> The very next week I found myself working as a housemaid for a German family. I worked three times a week and sometimes at weekends if the Madam demanded it [...] it was very hard work as there were six people in the family, among them two very untidy teenagers (p. 106).

She continues this job until she is laid off by her Madam who fears being charged by the authorities for employing an illegal African immigrant (p. 108). In addition, Mara does the housework—washing, cleaning, and cooking—in their own apartment.

In *Trafficked*, Fola, another victim, also works as a domestic servant. Although the novel does not elaborate on her personal experiences, it is obvious she regards domestic servitude as a far better position than prostitution. In a fight with Alice, another victim, she mocks: "I'm glad I was trafficked as a domestic servant and not a sex slave like you" (p. 137). This perception of prostitution as a form of slavery is reiterated

by Barry (1995) and echoed by Burn (2005, p. 35) who further defines it as "plainly about sexual objectification of women […] clearly driven by economics[and] about women as commodities to be bought and sold and about how women's few economic options may force them into prostitution". Forced prostitution is even more extreme and this is what most of the trafficked women in the novels, among them Mara, Nneoma and Efe, endure to redeem their debt bonds.

Moorehead observes of the women victims of trafficking:

> What is clear is that the conditions surrounding trafficked women […] include all the classic elements traditionally associated with slavery: abduction, false promises, transportation to a strange place, loss of freedom, abuse, violence, and deprivation. [They] are isolated, controlled by various emotional and physical techniques […] duped and terrorized into submission. (Moorehead, 2007, sect. 1, para. 7).

In *Beyond the horizon*, Mara is forced into prostitution by her husband who has her drugged and sexually assaulted by different men and filmed. This video is then used to blackmail her into complying with Akobi's demand that she works as a prostitute because she is "too illegal and too black for any other job" (p. 114). Mara narrates:

> Oh yes I got it, but too late, because before I could understand enough to acknowledge to myself that the best thing would be to pack my bags and flee, to return to Naka and to hawking boiled eggs, which was a far, far nobler job, I was made the property of a good-looking dark haired man who owned a sex nightclub called Peepy (p. 114).

This is the beginning of Mara's travails as a prostitute whose body and labour are used to enrich her husband, and Pompey, the owner of the sex nightclub. In *Trafficked*, however, Nneoma discovers she has been trafficked when they arrive in Italy instead of the United Kingdom. She recounts:

> In Italy I discover 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 to call Captain, is her bodyguard. She keeps us prisoner in her flat. Life is hell in Rome—we are always walking the night, selling sex to Italian men and foreigners […] I am completely devasted by the life I'm forced to live (pp. 128, 129).

Efe and Nneoma's experiences are very similar. Both are sold to vicious Nigerian women who make them "walk the streets every night"

(p. 99), and later sold to pimps who further use and degrade them for their own gain. In the case of Mara, Nneoma and Efe, Barry's (1995, p. 24) observation that "when women are reduced to their bodies, and in the case of sexual exploitation to sexed bodies, they are treated as lesser, as other" is validated, for not only are they objectified, their dignity and humanity are also denigrated. Nneoma and Efe's ordeals only end after their escape from their "captors", subsequent arrest and deportation by the authorities. Mara's peculiar situation, however, does not accord her a similar ending.

The significance of self-narratives in rehabilitation and reintegration

For postmodern feminists, language is very important because through it reality and meaning are constructed. As such, "the patriarchal control over traditional modes of speech entails that cultural meanings are determined on the basis of masculinist perceptions and experience" (Mui & Murphy, 2002, p. 11). Mui and Murphy (2002) further explain that when a woman's world is devastated through the experience of any form of trauma, the construction of self-narratives enables her to regain not only her sense of self, but also her power of self-representation and self-actualization.

Consequently, the process of rehabilitation becomes very crucial to the recovery of trafficked women because of the general belief that women who have gone through the trauma of trafficking can never sufficiently recover from the damage it does to their lives to become respectable and worthy contributors to society. However, if properly planned and implemented, rehabilitation should offer women victims the space and opportunities to successfully reconstruct their lives.

In *Trafficked*, Nneoma and Efe are traumatized by the horrors they endure: deceit, betrayal, threats, isolation, physical and sexual assault, rape and bonded labour. They are also shamed, humiliated, angered by the way they are perceived by society, and afraid of how their families will react to their status as "trafficked women". Alongside several other deportees, they are taken in by the Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development, a non-governmental organization (supported by the government and the private sector) for a one-year rehabilitation programme. During this period, they are empowered for a better future by being

trained in a trade of their choice. They also benefit from seminars, workshops and motivational talks organized by the NGO. In addition, they receive stipends for their upkeep.

Neoma and Efe seize the opportunity to redeem their lives, but in the process, they also form a bond of sisterhood and, through this, construct their personal narratives, an integral aspect of the rehabilitation process, overlooked by the NGO. According to Parnell (1997, p. 92), a clinical psychologist, "Traumatic events […] can have a devastative effect on a person's life […] change our views about ourselves and our world and shake the foundation upon which we have built our lives". She further notes that in talking about traumatic events, victims can experience some "desensitization" as the traumatic event "loses its emotional charge, and erroneous beliefs and unhealthy behaviours cease" (Parnell, 1997, p. 93). Feminist psychotherapist, Brown (2011–2016) concurs with Parnell by postulating:

> Inviting trauma survivors to tell their stories is the process of gradually rewriting their life narratives so that […] the reality of the experience of trauma is acknowledged […] as part of the individual's autobiographical narrative[as] the survivor rewrites the story of what [her] life means with trauma in it (Brown, 2011–1016, remembering section, para. 3).

Clearly, a successful construction of one's self-narrative paves the way for healing and empowerment.

In *Trafficked*, Efe is the first to raise the issue of self-narrative construction to Nneoma:

> I think the time has come for us to bare our minds to each other […] I know we've both been hurt. Terribly hurt. I see it in your movement, in your silences. 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 so bitter, to punish yourself like this […] I just want to be your friend in the real sense, to carry some of your burden, if you allow me and also get you to share some of mine, if you are willing (p. 96, 97).

Being very perceptive, Efe recognizes and accepts the fact that they are "all broken inside" (p. 97) and in need of healing to enable them to move on with their lives. She also realizes that constructing the narratives of their experiences by sharing them with each other will begin the healing process. It is this knowledge that prompts her to make a final

appeal which finally prevails over Nneoma's uncertainties: "Look, why don't we just tell each other what happened to us? Perhaps finding our voices will help us to heal" (p. 97).

Brison (2002, p. 137) remarks that "the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathic others". Indeed, by sharing their self-narratives, both Nneoma and Efe recognize the similarities in their experiences, identify their strengths and weaknesses, note the right and wrong turns they have taken, and encourage each other. The success of this form of self-representation, evident in the case of Nneoma and Efe, reinforces the argument of postmodern feminists that speech is power. It is this power, gained through the construction of their self-narratives, that frees them to rewrite their current narrative by rising above their status as victims, and regaining control of their lives.

In *Beyond the horizon*, Mara strikes a friendship with Kaye, the African wife of Pompey. Kaye is the first woman Mara bares her soul to completely. Kaye reciprocates the gesture and a sisterhood is established between them. Mara reveals: "She was the first person I told my whole story, only to hear from her that she too had gone through a similar ordeal years ago, except that in her case the man who did it to her was her boyfriend and not her husband" (p. 116). After listening to Kaye's narrative, which is almost a replica of hers, Mara begins to ask herself some hard questions:

> Why couldn't I take control of my own life, since after all, I was virtually husbandless, and anyway, what did my husband care about a woman's virtue? [...] So why should the money I made go to him? What had he ever done for me? Once a prostitute, always a prostitute. The stamp would never leave me. So why care about a sex orgy video with me in it? [...] So why did I wear myself out with men and let him take the money? If I couldn't help myself out of my situation then why not turn it to my advantage? (p. 119).

Excited by the change she witnesses in Mara's perception and attitude, Kaye encourages her thus:

> At last, Mara! You have woken up. I have been waiting for you to wake up by yourself. I could have woken you up, of course, but in this business, which operates in a world of its own and is far colder than the cold world outside, it is always better to wake up by yourself. Only then do you fight to remain awake because you know how difficult that waking up has been and what

> a long time and a lot of thinking it takes, and you also know what it means to be asleep. You understand (p. 119)?

Sharing their narratives raises Mara's consciousness, enabling her to take certain actions that change her situation for the better. First, she raises enough money to "buy" her residency by marrying a German. Secondly, she pays Gitte a visit during which she learns why Akobi had her brought to Germany, in the first place, and forced into prostitution: he had brought his first love, Comfort, to Germany (on the pretext that she is his cousin) even before sending for Mara. The purpose of his enslavement of Mara is to give Comfort, who had ironically rejected him in Ghana, a comfortable lifestyle in Europe. Gitte recounts:

> I noticed that Cobby has power over you. He controls you. It wasn't like that with Comfort at all. She had the power. She controls Cobby and shouts at him. Then, too, with Comfort, Cobby wanted a different arrangement […] and at our expense. He didn't want her to live in the apartment with us like you did […] He wanted to rent a whole apartment for her in town […] he wouldn't have Comfort living with us and sleeping in the living room like she was our housemaid (p. 124).

The realization that Akobi has used her (and Gitte) to attain the life he has always wanted with Comfort shocks Mara and leaves her pained and disillusioned, not only for herself, but also for Gitte who is still unaware of the truth.

Obviously, Mara's self-representation changes her perspective of, and her attitude to life so much so that Kaye observes: "[Mara] is standing before me […] but she isn't the same any more. You are no more you, Mara. You've changed" (p. 127), to which Mara responds: "No, Kaye […] I'm still me. I have just understood the world a bit better" (127). Mara's next step is to hire a detective, Gerhardt, who gets her every information she needs on Akobi and Comfort in a report which shocks her even more:

> I felt drained, so drained that I had to ask for a glass of water. My husband brings me from home to a foreign land and puts me in a brothel to work, and what money I make, he uses to pay rent on his lover's apartment, and to renovate a house for her in her village back home. I came to Gerhardt expecting the worst, but this was even worse than I had conceived of (p. 137–38).

Mara sends this report anonymously to Gitte who hands it over to the authorities. This results in Comfort's deportation while Akobi is

jailed. Gitte also divorces Akobi and returns to her family that had disowned her for marrying him. With Kaye's help, Mara escapes from Hamburg to Munich where she works for Oves—"a new lord"—having gained a level of control over her body and her earnings but marred by her victimization.

Unlike Nneoma and Efe who are arrested, deported back home, and rehabilitated, Mara feels she is too deeply embroiled in prostitution and pornography to ever return home. The following assertion further explains her reasons:

> The rot has gone too deep for me to return to the old me [...] I have decided to stop thinking about ever going home. I just don't belong there any longer. Moreover, I have this fear that haunts me day in and day out, that if I show my face there one day, out of the blue that sex video Akobi made of me clandestinely will show up there, too. Worse still, I am now to be seen on a couple more sex videos. Home will have to remain a distant place (p. 131; 139).

Wijers (1998, p. 75) aptly notes that the family, in many cases is dependent on the trafficked women's income but there is likely to be serious social consequences should they know that she works as a prostitute". Such is the case of Mara who makes a conscious effort to make as much money as she can to take care of her family back home, especially her sons, having concluded that material things are all she can offer them (p. 140). For this reason, she encourages Mama Kiosk, her only contact in Ghana through whom she sends things to her family, to believe that she works in an African restaurant. She becomes resigned to her fate, psychologically enslaved by her perception of herself; in her words, "there's nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them" (p. 140). Her new-found "liberty", therefore, becomes an irony because it cages her in Germany where she remains lost to her family (the only ones who benefit from her labour and sacrifices) forever.

Conclusion

Criminal trafficking networks take advantage of vulnerable African women, many of whom become entangled in various forms of debt bondage including domestic servitude and prostitution in different parts of the world. It has been established that globalization, patriarchal attitudes, gender inequality, female subjugation, poverty and lack of job

opportunities are largely responsible for women falling prey to traffickers. As such, it is essential that African nations formulate and implement policies and integrated programmes in line with international standards and feminists' objectives aimed at protecting women from repressive patriarchal structures and socio-cultural values and practices that reinforce gender inequality, infringe on the rights of women, and marginalize them. This will create room for the empowerment of women which will equip them to participate actively in all spheres of society and remove them from poverty.

Also, as noted by Waugh (2006), restrictive migration and immigration policies often encourage and sustain multinational trafficking industries which profit from the trafficking of women (cited in Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2008, p. iv). Such policies must be revisited and reformed to be more accommodating to prospective migrants who might otherwise fall victim to traffickers who serve as buffers between them and these restrictive migration processes. Such processes are often illegal and render their migration status irregular and criminal. This, in addition to their identity papers and other documents being confiscated by their traffickers, makes them wholly dependent on them.

Trafficking groups also go unreported and uninvestigated due to structural and systemic deficiencies which encourage corruption among law enforcement agents. These deficiencies such as poor salaries, and lack of proper training, and equipment, should be addressed and corrected to enable them work efficiently in tracking and apprehending such criminals. Awareness must also be created among the public on trafficking and the modus operandi of traffickers to enable them spot and report any such syndicate.

Above all, it is important that post-recovery programmes, vital instruments in successful rehabilitation and reintegration, are established to cater to the needs of women victims. A good example is the Oasis Youth Centre for Skills Development, the non- governmental organization depicted by Adimora-Ezeigbo in her novel, which rehabilitates the deported victims. Brown (2002) emphasizes the need for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes to ensure that victims regain control of their lives, for "it is only when we have created the space for the trafficking victim to [recognize herself] again as a person, not as object, whose agency we respect and whose value is inherent, that she […] becomes a survivor" (Brown 2002, para. 10). Thus, to be effective and successful, the following are crucial in the rehabilitation process: a conducive space,

medical care and counselling for the victims which must include the opportunity for them to construct their self-narratives to quicken their healing and empower them. The following assertion reinforces the significance of this strategy:

> we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured (Brison, 2002, p. 147).

A successful rehabilitation and reintegration programme, therefore, requires an understanding not only of trafficking, but also of the factors underlying the victims' trafficking, as well as their experiences, and the damages they have sustained.

In Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Nneoma and Efe are beneficiaries of the above process: they acquire tailoring and hairdressing skills which they put to good use. Nneoma gets a tailoring job, takes the university entrance examination, and is admitted for a degree course in business education; she also eventually reconnects with her family and fiancé. Efe also returns home where she is employed by a notable hairdresser and becomes engaged to a man of her choice. On the other hand, we witness the disadvantages of not benefitting from this process through Mara, who becomes one of the several victims of trafficking lost in the criminal and stigmatized system of prostitution. Unable to change her current narrative and rediscover herself, Mara is unable to find her way back home.

Most importantly, there must be total commitment on the part of all involved in this process—government and its agencies, NGOs, groups, individuals, and society in general—to restoring and protecting the rights and dignity of the victims. This will empower them to rewrite the script of their lives for a better and more fulfilling future.

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