

THE PLIGHT OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN SELECTED NOVELS OF ADIMORA-EZEIGBO AND UNIGWE

By

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Abstract

*Migration has continued to attract the interest of scholars and critics of Nigerian literature, especially as Nigerian migrants are constantly victims of xenophobia. The migrants, particularly the women, are grossly objectified and insufferably abused, both nationally and internationally. There have been spates of incarcerations, killings and deportation of migrant women in different parts of the world: Italy, Malaysia, Libya, to mention but a few. There have also been records of deaths and harrowing experiences of female migrants in the Mediterranean Seas and the Sahara Desert. It is against this backdrop that this study adopts Post-colonial Feminism to analyse the motivations and experiences of the female migrant characters as post-colonial subjects in the Diaspora. Female characters from Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* are studied in order to ascertain the extent to which the cultural environment, legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism interplay to influence the decisions taken by these women. It is discovered that the woefully pathetic plight of migrant Nigerian women is a product of a disordered psyche induced by the socio-political, economic and cultural realities prevalent in postcolonial Nigeria. This study recommends that women empowerment and sustainable developmental policy implementation can help to curtail the psycho-emotional realities that are capable of misleading young Nigerian women.*

Keywords: migration, postcolonial, neo-colonialism, feminism, Diaspora.

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Introduction: The Delusion of a Paradise Abroad

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and colonialism are two phenomenal events which opened a door through which a substantial number of Africans (were) moved to Euro-America. Those who were moved during the slave trade were forcefully transported to different parts of the West where they were coerced to work and live under differing dehumanising conditions while the bulk of African migrants who left the continent during the colonial period were “students leaving ... for educational advancement ... whom on completion of their studies returned home” (Ichie, 2016, p. 3). Essentially, after acquiring western education and ways of knowing, the students fought for the liberation and independence of African countries from European imperial domination and colonization. Their effort was rewarded as many African countries gained political independence in the 1950s and 1960s.

However, post-colonial disillusionment which swept through the entire African continent ushered in another epic spate of movements or migrations which has persisted even in the twenty-first century in more diverse and novel forms. Unarguably, the post-independence reality which manifests in the forms of military tyranny, corruption in all its guises, the debilitating conditions of living, war etc., have all culminated to force many Nigerians/Africans to seek refuge in Euro-America and other parts of the world where the odds seem better. In view of the prevalent social order in Nigeria/Africa of the post-independence era, it is apparent, as Ichie (2016, p. 8) reveals, that:

Endemic corruption, poverty, famine, war, and natural disasters have triggered a new wave of migration overseas due to the wrong impression that once they go abroad, better life and greener pasture automatically await them. They have the erroneous belief that there is a DOLLAR AVENUE overseas where they can make quick money. Unfortunately, many have died in an attempt to reach Europe through the Sahara Desert, and others have ended up in prison.

The quote above fully captures the essence of the introductory aspect of this paper which is entitled “The Delusion of a Paradise Abroad.” The noun ‘delusion’ is used to represent the inability to reasonably differentiate the real from the unreal; what is, from what seems to be, especially as a result of a dis-ordered state of mind or mental confusion. This ‘dis-ordered state of mind’ is a direct product of an awry romance which Nigerians in particular and Africans in general had and still have with the unfortunate social reality

which results from the failure of leadership which according to Chinua Achebe, is squarely the problem with Nigeria (*The Trouble with Nigeria*, 1983). This failure of leadership was what produced the general disillusionment that characterized the Nigeria of the post-independence era: the Nigeria which Britain handed over to the then emergent Nigerian elites, with high hopes of better life and economic growth. It was a Nigeria on its way towards joining the league of developing nations in just about a decade or two, if well managed. But within less than a decade, everything came crashing: first, there were allegations of massive and cancerous corruption and looting of the public treasury by public office holders, followed by a coup and a counter-coup, and then a three-year civil war which saw the devastation of the newly born entity, called Nigeria. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2009, p. 56-57) capture the frustration occasioned by post-independence disillusionment in Nigeria thus:

A nation that should be heaving a huge sigh of relief, having disentangled itself from the vice-like grip of colonial domination, soon found out that her troubles were far, far from being over. First, came the realization that our indigenous politicians lacked what was needed to steer the ship of the complex mosaic of a country to the much anticipated paradise. Next, came a series of unfortunate incidents which exposed the socio-political frailties and vulnerabilities of the young nation: the pogrom, political unrests, the ill-fated census, the coup and the counter-coup etc., and inevitably, the nation was plunged into a brutal civil war which ended in its thirtieth month in January, 1970, leaving behind the most colossal destruction of lives and property in the young nation's history.

Obviously, the cataclysmic events of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 and the attendant fall-outs have continued to plague the people of Nigeria almost fifty years after. Nigeria is yet to emerge as a developed nation because a greater percentage of its people still lack basic amenities and still live in abject poverty and deprivation. The crop of political elites to which the colonial masters handed over the reins of power failed to live up to expectation, and those who succeeded them have proven to be worse and have continued to perpetuate incompetence, mediocrity, corruption, divide and rule and several other forms of leadership ineptitude.

Regrettably, Nigeria still depends on the goodwill of the imperial powers of Europe despite its much vaunted independence. Evidently,

Nigeria's "dependence, underdevelopment, underutilization and [very high rate of] poverty have led to the migration of professional and non-professional African men and women to the economically developed world" (Ojaide, 2012, p. 30) in search of greener pasture, with the belief that 'abroad' is a paradise. Migration, whether wilful or coerced, is induced by a maladjusted psyche brought about by the rather unfortunate and harsh conditions of living in a country where nothing seems to be working.

Who then is a migrant? A migrant can be defined as a person who moves from one place to another whether locally or across borders especially in search of work. However, The International Organization for Migration submits that a migrant is:

Any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state, away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status, (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is. (<https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>).

It needs to be mentioned that in recent times, many migrants are often victims of abuse, hate and spates of xenophobic attacks. For instance, Akino (2017) reports that the Special Assistant to the Nigerian President on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, Abike Dabiri-Arewa has confirmed that "Over 116 Nigerians were killed within two years in South Africa. She said 63 per cent of the extrajudicial killings were carried out by the police" (<https://www.naija.ng/1087103-116-nigerians-killed-safrica-years-fg.html>). In most cases, women migrants are more vulnerable to the spates of insufferable abuse, killing and deportation than their male counterparts. The following report validates this submission:

Italian prosecutors have commenced investigations into the deaths of 26 Nigerian women whose bodies were discovered at sea ... the victims, who are mostly teenagers, aged 14-18, are believed to have been sexually abused and murdered as they attempted to cross the Mediterranean... the women's bodies were being kept in a refrigerated section of the warship. Most of the 375 survivors brought to Salerno were sub-Saharan Africans from Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, The Gambia and Sudan. Among the survivors were 90 women, eight of them pregnant, and 52 children.... Thousands of Nigerians travel through the desert to Libya, from where they try to cross the

Mediterranean to Italy seeking better life. Hundreds of such Nigerians, who could not make the crossing, end up getting trapped in Libya ... (www.premiuntimesng.com/news/headlines/248485-26-dead-nigerian-women-found-in-spanish-warship.html).

Unarguably, there are migrants who choose to leave the shores of Nigeria quite deliberately and there are those who are coerced or tricked into moving abroad unaware of what awaits them there. The latter class of migrants constitutes victims of human trafficking, an act of gross violation and abuse of human rights which have gained currency in the twenty-first century Nigeria. The nefarious act of human trafficking evidently involves:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or 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, for the purpose of exploitation. (<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>).

As victims of human trafficking, most of the women are tricked, abducted and in some extreme cases coerced into moving abroad, unaware of what lies in wait for them. In fact, their dis-ordered psyche which results from certain experiences such as abject poverty and deprivation, abuse of diverse forms, ignorance, inordinate ambition, get-rich-quick syndrome, etc., lead them into the net of human traffickers who deceive them with promises of a better life, quick money, good job, etc., which supposedly await them whenever they leave the shores of Nigeria. Some contemporary Nigerian writers have creatively documented the ordeal of migrants some of whom are victims of human trafficking and wilful self-enslavement. Among them are Tina Okpara (*My Life Has a Price*); Chris Abani (*Becoming Abigail*); Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (*Trafficked*); Chika Unigwe (*On Black Sisters' Street*); Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Americana*); Ifeoma Chinwuba (*Merchants of Flesh*); etc. It therefore should be admitted that issues such as migration, human trafficking, international sex trade, homosexuality and the Diaspora are global phenomena that have constituted worthy subject matters of twenty-first century Nigerian writing despite Charles Nnolim's (2012, p. 135) disparaging submission that:

Now we find that after the military, people don't have a direction any longer. That's why I call them the 'fleshly school'. The focus is now on women, wine, club, fun, etc. In fact, Femi Osofisan wrote an article he sent to me the other day, where he conveyed his astonishment at the level of sexuality expressed by our young writers.

It is obvious that 'our young writers' have grappled with themes and subject matters that are serious and of global significance.

Essentially, Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2010) vividly portray the plights of migrant women whose stories capture the diverse experiences of the women who are victims of the criminal trade on human beings. This paper adopts post-colonial feminism as an analytical methodology to x-ray the motivations and experiences of the female migrant characters in Adimora-Ezigbo's *Trafficked* and Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* especially as post-colonial subjects in the Diaspora. This study reveals the extent to which socio-political and cultural factors, legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism interplay to influence the decisions of the female migrant characters. Finally, this paper proposes women empowerment as a panacea to the social and psychological realities that mislead young Nigerian women into the net of human traffickers.

Theoretical Clarification

Migration as an experiential reality in the twenty-first century is among the issues caused by colonialism, and which post-colonialism seeks to explore. In other words, post-colonial theory seeks to study the variegated fall-outs of European colonialism. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2006, p. 2) in their introduction to the second edition of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* submit that:

Post-colonial studies are based in the 'historical fact' of European colonization and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise. Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe

Since this essay is a study of the experience of migrant women characters selected from two texts of female Nigerian writers, post-colonial feminism

therefore serves as its theoretical framework. Mainstream or Western Feminism has been criticized by 'third world' feminists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in their essays "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985) and "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984) respectively, for its inability to represent the peculiar experience of women from post-colonial countries, more so because it supposedly is silent on the issues that have to do with class, race, feelings and experiences of women in the post-colony hence the emergence and consolidation of Post-colonial Feminism. Feminists in once colonized territories berate their western counterparts for their explicit euro-centrism and universalization of women and their experiences. This is to say that the 'first world' feminists tend to create a picture of homogenous woman-beings and have failed to present or represent 'third world' women whose experiences, feelings etc., are considerably different.

The concern of feminists in the post-colony therefore is to explore and expose the problems and experiences that are particularly peculiar to women of third world countries. They argue that the problems and experiences of women in the post-colony differ from those of their counterparts in the west and can therefore only be visibly and properly represented by feminists of such post-colonial nations. However, in its very broad sense, post-colonial feminism has been described as "any challenge to dominant patriarchal ideologies by women of the third world" (Young, 2003, p. 115). Speaking further, Young (2003, p. 115) explains that:

Post-colonial feminism is certainly concerned to analyse the nervous conditions of being a woman in a post-colonial [patriarchal] environment, whether in the social oppression of the post-colony or the metropolis. Its concern is not in the first place with individual problems but with those that affect whole communities.

Indeed, the concern which post-colonial feminism basically has for women of post-colonial countries is because the forms of oppression they face are utterly different from the ones faced by Euro-American women. This is to say that post-colonial feminists unequivocally reject and oppose the idea of universal oppressions and homogeneity as espoused by Western Feminism. Hence, they beam their searchlight on the conditions of being a woman in a post-colonial environment.

Tyagi (2004, p. 47) instructively submits that:

Post-colonial Feminist theory has always concerned itself with the relationship between a White feminist and her indigenous counterpart. In their eagerness to voice the concern of the colonized women, white feminists have overlooked racial, cultural and historical specificities that mark the condition of these women. In so doing, they have imposed white feminist models on colonized women, and thereby, worked as an oppressor.

Evidently, Tyagi establishes three obvious points for which Western Feminism is outrightly criticized by feminists from former colonies. Firstly, she reveals that white feminists have the tendency to play down on the notion of race especially as it affects women of the third world. Secondly, there is their preponderance to overlook those cultural and historical experiences that typically and specifically define the condition of third world women. Finally, the inclinations of white feminists listed above make them to impose Euro-American feminist ideals on their counterparts from post-colonial nations; this is viewed by third world feminists as an act of oppression. Post-colonial feminists have gone ahead to resist such imposition while acknowledging the very crucial and peculiar differences that mark the differing ways in which women from various nationalities, ethnicities and religiosities especially within former colonies experience oppression. This could actually be what Uko (2017, p. 101) has in mind when she proposes "The New Order" in the African Feminist agenda and implores women "to be fully responsive to the cultural, historical and psychological impulses that function against the interests and welfare of women of all classes and leanings."

It is, therefore, imperative to summarize this section by stating that post-colonial feminism which has Chandra Talapade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri, Lata Mani, Audre Lorde, Uma Narayan, etc., as some of its vocal advocates seeks to examine "in different contexts, women's lives, work, identity, sexuality and rights in the light of colonialism and neo-colonialism" (Mishra, 2013, p. 131). The lives and conditions of migrant women characters in the texts under study shall therefore be examined through the lens of Post-colonial Feminism.

Sexual and Economic Exploitation in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*

Nigerian writers have been immensely responsive in portraying the realities of the twenty-first century. The fervour with which they narrate the global phenomena of migration, human trafficking and international sex trade suggests a new direction in Nigerian, if not African literary tradition of which the enigmatic Charles Nnolim may not have considered when he disparagingly accused young Nigerian writers and their writing as being directionless. Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Trafficked* portrays the situation of migrant women of Nigerian origin who are sexually exploited as a result of their longing to better their lives which has been subjected to squalor. The story is situated within the post-colonial Nigerian nation from where it sets out to explore the dehumanizing and illicit human and sex trade.

The spatial setting of the story is one in which the characters – Nneoma and Efe – find themselves subjected to a life of redundancy, deprivation and abject poverty. Efe while narrating her story to Nneoma reveals the reason that made her to fall prey to the antics of human traffickers: “My family was poor; it was a struggle to put our meals on the table. Only my elder sister and I went to college. My three brothers dropped out before they finished primary school” (98). Obviously, it is the social reality which prevails in her society that leads her to begin to consider other ways of making her life and that of her family members better. This explains her failure to think well even when the condition of her being selected during the interview demands thoughtfulness. She reveals:

One day I saw an advertisement in a newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos. It asks young men and women who wished to work abroad to come to a certain address to be interviewed. You know how people longed to leave the country ...

I responded to the advertisement without my cousin's knowledge. 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 (98 - 99).

It needs to be mentioned that the debilitating social realities which prevail in the Nigerian nation – the spatial setting of the story – are clearly products of failure of leadership. The immense effects of these social realities affect the citizens greatly and induce in a majority of them a hankering for better life

and the delusion that there is a paradise abroad. Carling (2005, p. 1) submits that:

While poverty and unemployment are not unique to Nigeria, the level of peacetime violence, corruption and organized crime surpasses most other African countries. The fact that these evils have persisted after the return to democratic rule in 1999 has been a great disillusionment to many Nigerians, thousands of whom have sought asylum in Europe. In 2004, Nigerians were the fifth largest group of asylum seekers in Europe, but very few were granted protection.

For Efe, the harsh realities of deprivation, poverty and the bad socio-political condition of the country resulting from bad military and even civilian leadership create in her, and others of her kind, the longing to leave the country. In fact, this 'longing' to leave the country is reported as an overwhelming trendy craze of the time, which makes her to respond to the advertisement that sought for young people who are interested in working abroad, even without telling her cousin to whom she was on a visit in Lagos. On the contrary, the situation that led to Nneoma's predicament did not arise from socio-political condition of the time. It was rather out of the socio-cultural pinning which supposedly subjects the wife of an *Ozo nkwu* to living in the village of Ihite-Agu: a life which Nneoma detests and rejects for herself. She tells Ofomata:

But an elderly father-in-law trampling palm trees dressed in nothing but a loin cloth is one thing, but not my husband. This is the 21st century, remember! I won't marry you if you are going to become the next *Ozo nkwu*. I will not live the rest of my life trapped in Ihite-Agu by an outdated tradition (78).

It is instructive that Nneoma considers the stool of an *Ozo nkwu* as an oppressive and outdated tradition which subjects and traps the *Ozo nkwu* and his wife in the village. This is against the 21st century phenomenon of migration or movement either to urban centres or outside the shores of the country in search of better life. For Nneoma therefore, marrying an *Ozo nkwu* is clearly a form of limitation which she is not ready to permit, and the occasion of this argument signifies her breaking free from that limitation. The narrator tells us that "They had parted that day and never saw each other again before she fled the country" (79). It may be argued that Nneoma's ambitious nature, her possession of a 'stubborn spirit' that cannot

be limited to a life in the backwaters of Ihite-Agu by the straightjacket of tradition, her ambition to leave the village and all that it represents and offers, inform her jumping at the promise of a job offer overseas (126-128).

Unarguably, the socio-political and cultural circumstances that prevail in post-colonial Nigeria is one that conditions the mind of the majority of the citizens towards leaving the country. This disordered state of mind creates a delusion of a paradise abroad – a delusion that is exploited by human traffickers who promise unsuspecting individuals jobs and assurance of better life abroad only to ferry them out of Nigeria into different metropolis where they are subjected into a life of both sexual and economic exploitation. It is instructive to note that victims are not aware that they have fallen into the hands of ruthless traffickers until they reach their destination. Efe tells Nneoma: "That was my experience too: you hardly know where you are until you get there" (128), while Nneoma's response: "In Italy I discover I am trafficked. I have no say in the matter" (128) corroborates Efe's statement. Interestingly, though these two women who find themselves in Italy; Efe in Palermo and Nneoma in Rome, through the agency of women traffickers, their individual experiences as sex slaves are not homogenous. It is true that both of them find themselves in the hands of vicious masters, fellow women who make them to sell sex to Italian men, yet their experiences in the Diaspora are by no means the same. Nneoma's stubborn and revolutionary attitude earns her assault, both physical and verbal, from the men she is made to sell sex to and ultimately from her boss who is hell bent on recovering her money with which she bought her. In fact, Nneoma's condition becomes worse as she is sold to Baron, a sadist, who subjects her to all sorts of dehumanizing treatment. Efe, on her own part, though she passed through similar treatment in the hand of her boss, her second boss did not subject her to the same harrowing experience which Nneoma is subjected to. Nneoma's experience is reportedly more harrowing, more dehumanising than that of Efe. Hence, the differing psychological effects they have. Even after their deportation, Nneoma has a nightmare, which obviously is an expression of the mental or psychological trauma which her experience in the Diaspora induces in her (53-54). More so, she is secretive and quite reluctant in sharing her story.

It is imperative therefore to submit at this point that irrespective of the varying degree of the traumatizing experience of international sex trade which these migrant women characters are exposed to, the toll it has on them is enormous. The disillusionment which the reality of their situation in

the Diaspora breeds is evident. These are women who left the country in search of greener pasture, believing that there is a paradise abroad, and optimistic about their future but oblivious of their situation. However, their arrival overseas marks a turning point where the full implications of their decision to leave and the reality of their situation begin to dawn on them. They discover that they have been tricked, trapped, bought and sold into slavery. The devastation this experience has on their impressionable minds is completely overwhelming. Adimora-Ezeigbo's narrator tells us that Nneoma "had left with so much hope and aspiration; now she is returning in shame and hopelessness" (12). In fact, Nneoma herself makes this revealing statement while sharing her story with Efe: "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 all begins again at nightfall" (129). And for Efe, it is no less a terrible and shameful experience with its equal dose of psychic devastation. However, the therapeutic effect of their baring their sorrows to each other is worth mentioning, as both young women affirm:

"Efe, your story is so like mine. Thank you for telling it; I feel as if a load has been lifted off my shoulders... you can't imagine what hearing your story has done for me." Her eyes were clear and bright. Efe cried, "Nneoma, do you realize this is the first time I have seen your face cheerful and your voice light? (100).

From the above, it is obvious that many women in Nigeria and in other places are as "broken inside" (97) as Nneoma and Efe.

Adimora-Ezeigbo seems to be offering escape and deportation as the means of evading the dire and critical consequences and effects of the traumatizing experience of coerced sex trade in the Diaspora. The story of Nneoma and Efe as migrant women characters reveals the terrible plight faced by migrant women of the third world whose supposed escape from their indigenous country to the Diaspora under the delusion of a paradise abroad is akin to the idiomatic "jumping from frying pan to fire" thesis. The only means of getting out of the fire is through escape – running away from the oppressive grip of the traffickers. Truly, freedom comes their way only when they have successfully escaped from the men whom they are resold to. Their deportation to Nigeria and the consequent reformation that followed is clearly suggestive of the fact that even "as bad as things are here [in

Nigeria], home is home" (24) and it is only at home that they can have true freedom.

Sexual and Economic Exploitation in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

Chike Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* represents one of the well-received works that exploit the now global phenomena of human trafficking and international sex trade. It is the gripping story of African sex workers in the Diaspora who are ruthlessly exploited by the traffickers, their agents and even the men they sell sex to. Sisi and Joyce are two significant migrant female characters whose stories Unigwe exploits as a means of revealing the differing ways in which women from various nationalities and ethnicities in the third world countries experience oppression – an oppression that emerged in the light of colonialism and post-colonialism. The lives and conditions of these migrant women before and in the Diaspora expose the socio-political, cultural, racial and historical peculiarities that mark them out as women of the third world. In other words, from a post-colonial feminist standpoint, Unigwe reveals the extent to which colonial legacies influence the decision of these women as much as they mark them out as women whose experiences are defined by such indices.

We have drawn attention to the now perennial and debilitating problem of failure of leadership and the attendant disillusionment it produced which made the people to begin and even welcome intercontinental migration as a possible and only means of escaping the pervading hardship, unemployment, violence and deprivation which they suffer, believing, though wrongly, that there is a paradise abroad. This is no less the reason for which "Chisom dreamed of leaving Lagos ... she tried to imagine another year in this flat her father rented in Ogba. She tried not to breathe too deeply because doing so would be inhaling the stench of mildewed dreams" (18). She, together with her parents, hope that she will make life different and better for the family upon her graduation from the university and securing a well-paid job. However, this hope begins to fizzle upon her graduation:

The days after graduation were filled with easy laughter and application letters, plans and a list of things to do (the last always preceded by Once Chisom gets a job, or As soon as Chisom gets a job, or Once I get a job). For as her father would say, they were only two certainties in their lives: death and Chisom's good job ... and with her university degree nothing should stand in the way of the good job ...

Yet, two years after leaving university, Chisom was still mainly unemployed ... and had spent the better part of the two years scripting meticulous application letters ... But she was never even invited to an interview (21-22).

Evidently, her decision and determination to leave the country and her inability to turn down the offer by Senghor Dele, to sell sex in Italy, even when she expects her instinct to react otherwise, having known the implication of accepting the offer, emanates from a disordered state of mind orchestrated by an overwhelming disillusionment which makes her to muse to herself "*I must escape*" (30). Chisom, through this soliloquy reveals the utterly oppressive nature of her condition and her firm resolve to escape, even to murder Chisom and reincarnate as Sisi. It is imperative to point out that western education, one of the colonial legacies, has a way of inducing in young people like Chisom the belief that their survival only depends on white collar jobs. As such, when after graduation, Chisom could not get one as soon as expected, she becomes frustrated. That feeling of disillusionment eventually leads to her 'escape' to Belgium and then her death in the hands of Segun.

For Joyce (formerly Alek), coming from The Sudan, a post-colonial state, famous for unending rift and a civil war that raged for over twenty years, a fall-out of Anglo-Egyptian colonization, translates to a differing dimension of oppression characteristic of a war-torn zone. The kind of oppressive terror, brutality and bloodshed which have been carried out by the Arabic-speaking nomadic militia popularly known as the Janjaweed is of genocidal proportion. This has caused untold hardship and suffering, and has turned the majority of the people especially non-Arab Sudanese into refugees, asylum seekers and migrants seeking to escape the highly tensed and war-torn environment. Unigwe's narrator tells us that:

Alek's father, Nyok, hoped they could get resettled somewhere close to Khartoum. And eventually a migration to the United Kingdom or America ... The Sudan People's Liberation Army, which had been guarding the predominantly Dinka town, was withdrawing. There was a rumour that the Janjaweed militia were making their way to Daru. To sniff out the SPLA members. And to cleanse the city of its Dinka population. People were disappearing. They would have to travel light, Nyok said (187).

The shock, for the fifteen-year old Alek, of having to witness the eventual gruesome murder of her parents and her younger brother; and her being gang-raped by men of the Jawjaweed militia takes its toll on her as she eventually finds herself in a refugee camp. In fact, the experiences of witnessing the death of her beloved parents and her brother, and the brazen act of being callously and ruthlessly raped by the gang of the Janjaweed soldiers who killed her loved ones, are psychologically traumatizing for her impressionable psyche, as much as they mark the beginning of her displacement and 'maturative' dislocation. At fifteen, she was exposed to a life bereft of care and love; her experiences teach her that the world is full of wickedness and wicked people. It is not surprising then that she falls head over heels in love with Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier on African Union peace-keeping operation, whom she sees as being different from the rest she has ever had contact with and through whose agency she is able to escape the oppressive life of living in a refugee camp. And when she thinks she has succeeded in restoring stability and some sort of order to her rather abused psyche by migrating to Lagos, Nigeria with Polycarp, she becomes a pitiable victim of a tradition which prohibits a first son such as Polycarp from marrying a foreigner. The effect of this particular experience shattered and weakened Alek's resolve to pick up the pieces of her broken past: "The soldiers that raped her that night in Daru had taken her strength and Polycarp's betrayal had left her unwilling to seek it back" (231). Hence, she is unable to protest when the choice of travelling to Belgium to take up a job as a nanny is presented to her.

From all indications, the socio-political, racial and cultural realities which inform the decision and determination of these women vary considerably. The event of European colonialism had bred diverse oppressive and debilitating social conditions which affect women of the third world in varying dimensions and degrees. Their attempt at forging ahead sees them exploring migration as a means of escape. Indeed, the experiences as varied as they are prove, against the universalising tendency of western feminism, that though these women are from the same continent, yet their experiences of oppression and escape are by no means the same. It is instructive to observe that Senghor Dele, a human trafficking agent functions as the common denominator in the lives of these women. He baits them with a mouth-watering promise of a better life and a good job overseas. In Chisom's case, Dele is magnanimous in revealing to her the kind of job she will be doing in Belgium whereas Alek, on the contrary, is

promised a job as a nanny. However, the grave implication of their resolve to migrate to overseas begins to dawn on them fully when they arrive Belgium and into the hands of Madam, the ruthless and callous human trafficker. She tells Sisi, "Ah, hand over your passport. From now until your debt is paid, I am in charge of it" and indeed, "handing over her passport would be tantamount to putting her life in someone else's hand ..." (119). And for Joyce:

As soon as she stepped into the house in the Zwarte Zuster-Straat and saw the long thin mirror, she started to have her doubts about the sort of job she has been brought to do. When Madam came in to see her that first day and she asked, 'where are the children I am supposed to be looking after?' and Madam laughed so hard that tears streamed down her face and said, 'Which children? Which yeye children?' she felt a sandstorm whirling in her ... (233).

Their arrival in Belgium marks the beginning of their sexual and economic exploitation. They are tools with which Madam and Dele use to make money. In other words, the women work hard and slave themselves, selling their bodies to men to enrich other people. And worse still, they are so treated as slaves that they soon realize that their chance of making it abroad is very lean.

At the end, none of these migrant women is able to achieve her dream. The burden of having to pay debts owed Dele and Madam hangs around Sisi's neck like a hangman's noose and her attempt at breaking loose from their grip, of absconding into the wide arms of freedom and to Luc, her lover, without first of all settling her debts leads to her gruesome murder and an eternal abortion of her dreams. On the other hand, the narrator tells us that: "Joyce said she wanted to be a doctor. 'Doctor Alek, that was how I saw myself. I thought I would marry, give my parents grandchildren, work in the government hospital. Now, I think I'll settle for maybe a boutique. Or a huge supermarket in Lagos'" (243).

The reality of Sisi's death opens the eyes of the others to their vulnerability, mortality and above all, to their Madam's callous disregard for the sanctity of human life. Concerning her demeanour following Sisi's demise, Unigwe's narrator tells us that, "There is bitterness [in the young women] at the realization that for her, Sisi's death is nothing but a temporary discomfort" (39). Sisi's death, therefore, becomes a turning point in their career as prostitutes: a point at which they assess their lives in the light of their present predicament and begin to share the tales of their pasts

especially as migrant women from the third world, whose experiences, diverse as they are, mark them out.

Women Empowerment as a Solution to Wilful Self-enslavement: Being Proactive rather than Reactive to the Plight of Women

Women empowerment is presently a global phenomenon that is of fundamental importance and one of the intensely discussed topics in the world today. It has to do with the practice of creating a conducive environment, both at home and at the work place that will help to engender the well-being of women and the society at large. For the UN women (2011) there are "Women's Empowerment Principles" which should serve as a practical guide on women empowerment. They explain that: "Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sections is essentially to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities." For *Important India* (2015):

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their right, such as: freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity, ...to make their choices and decisions, ... have equal social status in the society, ... get equal opportunity for education, get equal employment opportunity without gender bias, get safe and comfortable working environment

In their opinion concerning the issue of women empowerment, Medel-Anonuevo and Bochynek (1995, p. 5) insist that, "The underlying assumption was that if women understood their conditions, knew their rights and learned skills traditionally denied them, empowerment would follow." That is to say that they singled out education both in its awareness-raising and skill acquisition forms, as a means towards women empowerment. Women education, for them, is therefore a prerequisite for improving the situation of women and emancipating them from oppressive practices that limit them.

Akachi-Adimora Ezeigbo, by being kind to her migrant characters; Nneoma and Efe, in *Trafficked*, in that they are among the twenty-four women who are deported, who find the way back home in one piece and are re-integrated into the society through the agency of the Oasis Youths Centre for Skills Development and above all their own willingness, is offering

education as a means of empowering women. The Managing Director of Oasis tells the girls that:

Our organization is dedicated to empowering young women like you, who have taken a wrong step in life but are willing and determined to change direction. We do not bother with what led to you being trafficked. What we care about is what you do with your life from now on. That is what matters (51).

It is unarguably true that the education or women empowerment which Adimora-Ezeigbo recommends as a means of empowering women is both in form of helping them to acquire skills that will make them become better individuals and also in form of formal education at least up to the university level. This is why the girls, those who are willing, are offered the choice of learning a trade – ‘tailoring, hairdressing, catering and pottery’. This is a life-line offered them and the fact that Nneoma and Efe are able to meaningfully utilize this opportunity is commendable. Significantly, Nneoma’s willingness and ambition of not limiting herself to the constraints of tailoring but choosing to get university education is quite worthy of emulation. More so, her finesse and exhibition of decorum and an enviable moral standard shows her off as Akachi’s image of a truly liberated and empowered woman.

It is in fact significant that Oasis, the agency that empowered the migrant women, that provided the life-line through which they are re-integrated into the society, did not bother about what led them into the international sex trade but were deeply concerned about what the migrant women will do after their repatriation. That Oasis is able to come up with a practical approach towards achieving its objective is also quite commendable but, actually suggests the necessity of being proactively pragmatic in nipping human trafficking rather than being reactive.

Conclusion

Indeed, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in *Trafficked* and Chika Unigwe in *On Black Sisters’ Street* use the instrumentality of their writing to lend their voices to the topical discourse on migration. The exploration and exposition of the plight of migrant women reveal, as this study shows, that migrant characters especially women are often victims of their own wilful enslavement and their idea, albeit wrong, of a paradise abroad. Their decision to migrate is always induced by a disordered psyche which results from the legacies of colonialism and neo-colonialism and worse still, “The unwillingness or

inability of [their] leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership" (Achebe, 1983, p. 5). Evidently, the conditions which make these migrant characters to opt for 'travelling out' as a means of escaping from the socio-political and cultural realities prevalent in their societies, are variegated. In other words, each woman faces a different form of oppression and for each of them freedom means a different thing. For instance, Chisom (Sisi) apparently is escaping from unemployment and deprivation whereas Alek (Joyce) escapes from the ravages of war, rape and racism.

However, the decision and attempt by these women to escape the differing forms of oppression to which they were exposed in the post-colony by migrating to the Diaspora land them into another, even more dehumanizing form of oppression and exploitation. And it must be borne in mind that it is not only men, such as Dele in *On black Sisters' Street* or Baron in *Trafficked* who oppress and exploit women. Women, such as Madam in *On Black Sisters' Street* and Madams Gold and Dollar in *Trafficked*, also oppress, humiliate and exploit their fellow women. Even the act of shaving the hair of Mbonu Ezenwa's widow, a cultural practice probably instituted by men but certainly executed by women, also highlights same, as in the following: Ofomata turned and looked towards the veranda of the house and saw his mother sitting on a mat on the hard floor, her shaven head smooth as a pebble. He had opposed her being subjected to this indignity but the Umuada, daughters of the extended family, had resisted him and his mother had accepted her fate without a murmur. Defeated, Ofomata had let the women have their way (294).

This casts aspersions on the much vaunted sisterhood of women. However, post-colonial feminism seeks to expose all forms of oppression and is committed to ending them through empowering women of the third world countries.

Recommendations

Having therefore appraised the plight of female migrant characters, what informed their choice of migrating abroad, and the consequences of such choice/decision, the following recommendations are hereby suggested as means of alleviating, if not completely eliminating, the plight of women:

1. Education of the girl child should be made a priority. There are no limits to the wonders which being educated can do in the life of a woman. Therefore, the gender inequalities that still persist in

- education should be eliminated. There should be equal rights to men and women in the fields of education, work, politics, etc.
2. Our leaders should eschew lethargy and rise to their responsibility as leaders. They should create the necessary and enabling factors which engender good living standard of the people especially women.
3. Government, organisations, churches and individuals, especially from the family level, should be proactive to the plight of women rather than being reactive. Practical programmes on how to alleviate the sorry plight of women should be tenaciously implemented, so that young women will be well-guided on how to confront the vicissitudes of life, and avoid falling victim to the wiles of human traffickers.
4. Modalities should be put in place by government to strengthen agencies such as the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) saddled with the responsibility of arresting and prosecuting human traffickers and their agents who subject women and even children to dehumanising and oppressive treatments abroad.
5. Finally, programmes such as seminars, motivational talk-shows and workshops should be constantly organized by relevant bodies as a means of enlightening people of the third world nations, especially women, that the idea of a paradise abroad is a delusion.

Expectedly, these suggestions or recommendations are far from being exhaustive. However, we believe that if they are duly considered and implemented by those concerned, the pitiable plight of women, especially those from third world countries would be considerably alleviated.

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