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Depictions of Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Contemporary Africa Using Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and Apio Eunice Otuku's *Zura Maids*

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02 Jun 2022 In 2020, the government of Uganda reported investigating 214 incidents of human trafficking involving 154 suspects; of these incidents, 118 were

Keywords: internal, 93 transnationals, and three unknowns. This was a decrease compared with investigating 252 incidents (19 internal and 222 transnational) in 2019.

Human Trafficking,
Depictions,
Forced Labour,
Exploitation,
Contemporary Africa,
Maids
This article examines how human trafficking and exploitation impacts on young girls from developing countries using Akachi Dimora Ezeig's novel; 'Trafficked' and Apio Eunice Otuku's 'Zura Maids'. Using content analysis, the study engages critical discourse of postcolonial tenets understand the creation of inferiority complex, identity crisis, and cultural erosion among the colonized. As a result of social justice principle of "otherness", which is a binary opposition between "I/We" and "Them", the study packages the problem neatly, but offers few solutions for Africa, whilst condemning human trafficking and exploitation as a heinous act on humanity.

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INTRODUCTION

Decolonial scholars such as Mignolo (2011), Apio (2018), Akachi (2008), Jonsson (2012), Bhabra (2012), Drexler-Dreis (2013), and Aníbal (2007), argue that Human Trafficking (HT) have a legacy in colonialism and imperialism. In East and West Africa, the legacy of transatlantic trade articulates the notions of sex trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, domestic servitude, unlawful recruitment, and use of child soldiers. Within the African society, the colonial matrix of power produced social discrimination eventually variously codified as racial, ethnic, anthropological, or national according to specific historic, social, and geographic contexts (Quijano, 2007). Decoloniality emerged as the colonial matrix of power was put into place during the 16th century Grosfoguel, (2004: 65). It is, in effect, a continuing confrontation of and delinking from, Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2007). Grosfoguel (2004) notes that Africa has moved from the era of 'global colonialism' to 'global coloniality', a transition that signifies the perpetuation of quasi-colonial relations long after the official demise of colonialism. Reading Apio's *Zura Maids* (2018) and Akachi's *Trafficked* (2008) through the theoretical prism of 'coloniality' allows us to provide a conundrum and nexus of postcolonial crisis that are abound in post independent African states.

Postcolonial literary theory has offered apt critical examinations of the different forces in society and how these forces influence societal expectations, norms, and values. Postcolonial theories emerged as a response to the excesses of colonialism and globalization or capitalism in the world. Bhabha & Young (1999) opines that post-colonial criticism bears witness to the uneven and unequal forces of

cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order.

Postcolonial theory is not a single theory but a combination of different theories. Postcolonial studies are based on the main aspects of colonialism and its pervasive effects which have persisted even after the end of colonial rule. This theory seeks to address many literary issues such as, how the literary text, explicitly or allegorically represents various aspects of colonial oppression, Ramon G. (p.327). This enabled the researcher to consider elements of the selected novels in the portrayal of human trafficking as thematic concern. It also questions what the text reveals about the problems of post-colonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity as such issues as double consciousness and hybridity. This helped the researcher to analyse how cultural changes affect the *Trafficked* and the forced characters in this study.

Post-colonial theory is also concerned with what the literary text reveals about the operations of cultural differences; that is, how race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity. This was highlighted through characterization and how characters are exploited in a new culture, Ndlovu (2020). The same theory is concerned with how the text responds to characters and thematic concerns in literary texts selected in this study. It also interests itself with the issue of similarities among the literatures of different post-colonial populations. This helped the researcher in dealing with the selection of the texts and in depictions of different settings in the novels under this study. Fanon (1965) examines a deep profound difference between the

people in the countryside and the national bourgeoisie in the urban areas whose members occupy the former colonial bureaucracies and enjoy the fruits of western-style of exploitation. In his treatise, *The Wretched of the Earth: The Trails and Tribulations of National Consciousness*, (1961; 2004), he asserts “Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. What a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized, distorts it and disfigures it. The effort to demean history prior to colonization, today takes on a dialectical significance.” (p. 149) This theory was suitable for this research as it explains what went wrong after independence in the colonized countries.

This research was hinged on the tenets of postcolonial theory which asserts that the colonized people should write their own history for their own consumption. It also maintains that the colonialist misrepresented the colonized peoples in their writings, Ndlovu (2020). Postcolonial critics therefore, seek to challenge these misrepresentations of the colonized by their colonizers. The researchers used this tenet to analyse how these African writers artistically wove human trafficking narratives in an African perspective.

This study also made use of the postcolonial tenet to oppose the creation of inferiority complex, identity crisis, and cultural erosion among the colonized people as a result of “otherness” which is a binary opposition between “I/We” and “Them”. This tenet helped the researcher to examine how the *Trafficked* characters are treated in their new places where culture is different from their own culture at home. It also helped the researcher to examine how the *Trafficked* girls lost their identity upon reaching in the diaspora.

Fanon (1961) reveals how the post-independence African leaders mismanaged the political, social, and economic well-being in their countries which caused a lot of problems to the progress of the citizens. Fanon (1961) observes that the post-independence African leaders became agents of the colonial masters and mismanaged their countries. He argues that these leaders are national elites who were not ready to replace their national masters. All

multinational companies that want to invest in former colonies must invest through these post-independence leaders. These post-independence leaders failed in the direction of transformation of their countries; they instead served as a conveyor belt for capitalism, Fanon (2004). This sabotaged the economic development since the masses have no stake in the national economy. This helped the researchers to analyse the factors, nature, and effects of human trafficking and forced labour, because the economy of every nation is the game changer in people’s livelihood.

In this theory Fanon raises the other issues that affect post-independent Africa. He argues that national efforts and unity are undermined on account of racial and tribal prejudice. The issues of ethnicity and class are high level after independence. This created tribal conflicts and political crises which are still in place unresolved. This tenet enabled the researchers through characterization and setting to depict human trafficking, forced labour and their pervasive effects.

Fanon (1961) also blames the post-independence African leaders for being corrupt and for working for the former colonial master, who remain in control to exploit Africans. The researchers considered corruption and neo-colonialism as part of the problems upon which human trafficking emanates from. He also blames the middle class who changed focus immediately after independence and betrayed the reason of the liberation struggle for their independence. They immediately became dictators, and their dictatorship is just meant to enrich themselves. This enrichment of the middle class plundered the national economy more than what the colonizers did. This tenet of the theory helped the researchers to trace the origin of human trafficking and forced labour as a business to enrich some few people through setting and characterization in the selected novels. The researchers used this tenet to investigate how unemployment, poverty and illiteracy contribute to human trafficking and forced labour in the selected text for this study.

In this article the post-colonial literary theory, is also anchored on Achille Mbembe’s *Postcolony: Aesthetics of Vulgarities* (2001). Mbembe, like

Fanon, blames and critiques the post-independence eras, stage-managed by puppet leaders, who replaced their former colonial masters. He characterizes post-independence as the worst-case scenario, whereby the leaders performed worst as compared to their former colonial masters. According to Achille, (2001), the post colony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency of excess and lack of provision, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation. The researchers made use of this tenet to examine and analyse these post-independence problems and show how they contribute to human trafficking in this research.

Achille (2001) also argues that the post colony is made up of a series of corporate institutions and political machinery that, once in place constitute a distinctive regime of violence. The researchers analysed that, it is this violence that results into human trafficking and forced labour. The researchers therefore, deemed it right to use this theory as it encompasses all post-independence problems that affect the wellbeing of the citizenry in both Uganda and Nigeria where the selected novels are set from.

With the post-colonial theory grounded in the theoretical framework, we structure this paper in five sections. Firstly, we locate our study historically and socially. Secondly, we present an overview of literature on human trafficking and exploitation in the context of Africa. This lays the ground for a later discussion on the relationships and their link to human trafficking globally. Thirdly, we discuss the embeddedness of HT in selected novels. Fourthly, we present the interlocutors' views and stories by characters on the topic. Fifthly, we conclude with a recommendation on what governments can do to ensure protection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper framed human trafficking and exploitation depictions in two selected African novels; Akachi's *Trafficked* (2008) and Apio's *Zura Maids* (2018). It also evaluated how the authors have succeeded in exposing depictions of human trafficking in those novels. Human trafficking and exploitation are a form of human right violation that has become rampant in Africa. It is perceived as a

modern form of slavery which impinges on the general well-being of young girls and boys, Yousaf and Purkayastha (2015) asserts that "although it has been two hundred years since slavery was officially abolished, there are millions of people across the globe who are still subjugated to slave-like conditions", Pg 8. Human trafficking is the biggest and fastest means by which people are exploited and forced into modern day slavery.

Currently, human trafficking and exploitation is the most lucrative and fastest growing sources of income for some secretly organized criminal organizations around the world. According to Yousaf & Purkayastha (2015), there are many kinds of trafficking. In Africa most of the different kinds of trafficking take place such as forced labour, domestic servitude, slavery, debt bondage, organ trafficking, and forced marriage. Girls are *Trafficked* to be "wives" and some are sold as child brides. Children are *Trafficked* for use in ritual sacrifice or as child soldiers, men are *Trafficked* for forced labour. Often times people are *Trafficked* from less developed countries in Africa into developed and industrialized nations such as United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, and United States among others for different purposes. Agbu (2003) views "human trafficking as an act of carrying boys, girls and women from their natural homes or habitation to foreign places where they may not be able to trace their way back home" (p. 29). Agbu (2003) further explains that human trafficking tends to be systematic in its occurrence most especially as globalization processes intensifies. Although previously its existence was in forms such as prostitution, child labour, and domestic servitude, today human trafficking is an organized business just as the transatlantic slave trade was with various linkages across the globe. Today, not only young boys and girls are *Trafficked* but also women fall prey to this heinous act, (Adepoju, 2005: 75-78). It can be argued that in this age of cellular phones, and internet, there are faster means of dealing in human commodities than before. Therefore, there is little doubt that globalization has created inequalities resulting into the migrations of the poor people from Africa to the rich regions of the world, Adepoju, (2005).

According to the International Labour Organization, Shamir (2012) nearly 21 million people across the

globe were forced into labour. Out of these 11.7 million came from the Asia Pacific region, 3.7 million from Africa and 1.8 million from Latin America. The demand for prostitutes, farm labourers, domestic workers, and child soldiers among others are the contributing factors to human trafficking which lead them into modern slavery. These desperate need for victims causes traffickers to harbour and transfer victims across states and countries, (Winterdyk, 2020). The huge gains traffickers will gain causes them to keep control of their victims by any means necessary, which includes scaring and forcing them to stay (Jacobi, 2012).

Kempadoo (2007), argues that human trafficking gained considerable attention in the early twenty-first century when it was cast alongside terrorism and drug trafficking as one of the three ‘evils’ that haunt the universe. As a theme in a contemporary African text, human trafficking has raised a lot concern and it has attracted many researchers’ attention. For instance, Charlotte Beyer, in her research entitled *Transnational Child Trafficking in contemporary Crime Fiction* (2018), investigated transnational child trafficking depictions in contemporary British and Scandinavian Crime fiction novels. The research also examined the self-perceived role of Europe as the destination for migrants, refugees and *Trafficked* victims. This

study helped in the current study as it shaded light on depictions of human trafficking upon which the current research was positioned in contemporary Africa.

Nadaswaran (2011), observed that poverty, criminality, and the lure of a better life working abroad have been the proliferation of human trafficking and sex slavery. Using feminist Theory, Nadaswaran further observed that Nigerian women writers have paid great attention to sex trafficking in their novels such as; Sansui’s *Eyo* (2009) and Unigwe’s on *Black Sisters Street* (2009). Nadaswaran (2011) depicted representations of *Trafficked* women in those novels. She observed that Igbo writer along with her Yoruba counterpart, Unigwe and Sansui, perform a collective womanist critique of the systematic and regulated business of sex trafficking in Nigeria. Their in-depth study guided the current study to investigate how authors represent human trafficking in selected contemporary African novels since their study highlighted sex trafficking, one form of human trafficking. The researcher noted that the Nigerian human trafficking experience depicts Africa as a continent in general. This guided the selection of the current texts for this study both from Uganda and Nigeria. The debate on human trafficking packages the problem neatly, but offers few solutions for Africa.

Figure 1: Human trafficking in Uganda



Source: (Interpol, 2019)

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was largely descriptive based on the two African novels selected in order to examine the depictions of human trafficking and exploitation. It took a qualitative approach which was used in accordance with data collection, interpretation, and analysis. This research approach was used to spell out ways through which human trafficking and forced labour was depicted in the selected novels. The qualitative approach was also employed to analyse techniques used to depict human trafficking and forced labour. This again helped the researchers to vividly describe the data collected from the selected novels.

Additionally, the researchers used close reading of the selected texts as the main method to get information. The research employed textual analysis technique where the two selected novels; *Trafficked* (2009) and *Zura Maids* (2019), as primary source of data were closely read to dig out depictions of human trafficking and exploitation as a thematic concern in the selected novels. The study also made use of numerous other texts such as; Unigwe's on *Black Sister's Street* (2009); Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995); Ifaenyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* (2013); Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); Homi, K. Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) among others for the secondary source of data. In this study the researchers employed qualitative content analysis. In this case the researchers read the selected texts several times, coded the information and generated concepts from which depictions of human trafficking were derived. The researchers used aspects such as; Depictions of human trafficking and exploitation in *Trafficked* (2008), Depictions of human trafficking and exploitation in *Zura Maids* (2019). Factors that fuel human trafficking and exploitation in the selected novels, effects of human trafficking in the selected novels and the aspects of the primary texts which include; Setting, Narrative techniques and Characterization.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Context of the debate within contemporary African Literature; (Depictions of human trafficking in *Zura Maids* (2018)

Zura Maids opens with Lena Ayugi, the protagonist of the novel narrating her experience at Luzira prison where she has been on charges of burning a brothel in Kawempe, a Kampala suburb where *Trafficked* girls have been kept; she has been one of them. Through the first-person narrator, the author depicts human trafficking and exploitation as a social evil that disorganizes the society. Lena Ayugi is used by the author as a micro-cosmic depiction of many other young *Trafficked* characters that are facing the same experience in the novel. She represents other victims of human trafficking and exploitation who have been enslaved by their traffickers for a long time both internally and internationally. Through setting, the author has been able to depict human trafficking and forced labour at two levels. The *Trafficked* characters are recruited from upcountry to Kampala and then exported to other countries, thus a clear picture of the scope of this human trade is revealed to the reader. While narrating her ordeal of human trafficking to Maria and Mama Jen, Lena refers to human trafficking as enslavement, and thus laments;

"I know, because when she took me, she handed me over to ...untold slavery"

"I would rather not tell you the details of my enslavement", she said (55-56).

The researchers analysed the use of first-person narrator "I know". where the protagonist narrates her own experience that brings out the first-hand information about human trafficking depictions in this novel. Lena's suffering in the hands of the human traffickers is the suffering of her fellow young and vulnerable children that Old Esther lures from their camps in Acokora and from other parts of the country and she *Trafficked* them to Kampala where they are prepared in different brothels for export to other countries of the world as trade commodities. It is therefore through Lena's narration of her own experience that the author depicts human trafficking in this novel.

The researcher made a critical analysis of *Trafficked* (2008) and *Zura Maids* (2018) and identified how human trafficking and exploitation is depicted through setting and characterization, among other aspects of this novel. *Zura Maids* depicts human trafficking and exploitation as both domestic and cross boater trade. The victims are domestically

recruited, prepared, and then exported to the international markets that deal with human trafficking for different sorts of exploitation. Through setting, plot, characterization and narrative point of view, depictions of human trafficking are well examined in the novel. The events in the novel rotate in Acokara, Kampala and other countries abroad. Lena Ayugi, the protagonist of the novel is *Trafficked* from her temporary home, Acokara, a Displaced Peoples' Camp to Kampala, under the guise of *Trafficked* poor young girls, whom she braves to save by burning down the brothel in which they have been kept. It is therefore, through characterization that the reader gets to know how Lena saved her *Trafficked* young girls.

The author portrays young, naïve girls as major victims of human trafficking in this novel. This character portrayal enabled the researchers to identify the victims of human trafficking and what makes them victims. In this chapter, the researcher argued that Lena and her fellow victims of human trafficking are recruited when they are unaware that they have been *Trafficked* from up country only to find themselves in different brothels in Kampala. Lena Ayugi and her fellow victims do not even know what human trafficking means thus asks:

“...before you came, Akurut here was talking about human trafficking and trying to link it to Martina... Please explain to me in simple terms what exactly human trafficking is” Lena said (p. 165)

This reveals that despite all the naughty experiences that Lena has gone through, she has not yet realized that she is a survivor of human trafficking. However, Arthur Mubende, Lena's former attorney and now a friend, explains to Lena what human trafficking means;

“let's say what old Esther did to you is a typical example, she deceived you that there was a housemaid job waiting for you here in Kampala, then transported you and then before you knew it, she had handed you to some strange people who forced you into sexual slavery. However, unlike you, other victims may be killed for rituals, forced to work in factories or become beggars as we see with many children on Kampala streets” Arthur said (p. 165).

Going forward therefore the article investigates numerous forms of human trafficking taking place in Africa particularly in Nigeria and in Uganda. Through characterisation, the author agitates for an action to combat this modern-day exploitation that impinges on human rights of the *Trafficked* characters in different forms. It is through characters interactions and narrations that the researchers realized that the *Trafficked* girls are naïve and ignorant about human trafficking despite of being victims of the same problem.

The researchers therefore analysed that human trafficking is a systematic network, with many agents up country, who recruit their victims from the villages. In this novel, Apio gives detailed information on this network through both characterization and setting. Esther, who recruits Lena and other victims of human trafficking, coordinates with the management of *Zura Maids*, a business enterprise in Kampala that has numerous deals with many agencies, where young girls are *Trafficked* to. The human trafficking network owns several brothels in Kampala where their victims are kept as they are prepared for export to other countries of the world. When Lena falls in the hands of the traffickers again, a lady who identifies herself as the warden of the dungeon, leads her into a dark room where she finds other girls and she is informed that she will be staying there. “This is where you will be moulded into something marketable...” Madam Nancy said (p. 208).

This is a clear indication that the *Trafficked* young girls are handled and shuffled like material goods for trade. The researchers therefore argue that human trafficking is depicted as a trade in human beings, through characterization. This chapter also depicts that human trafficking takes place in different settings both internally and internationally.

Human trafficking victims do not easily realize that they have been *Trafficked* until they are subjected to inhuman conditions. For instance, Lena falls victim of human trafficking again in her attempt to rescue her sister, Lilly, who has been *Trafficked* by the same network that had *Trafficked* her.... “Madam, where are we? Why are the girls naked? Lena asked, (p. 208). It is therefore important to note that the author vividly depicts human trafficking through characterization in the novel. The author portrays

two types of characters, that is, the oppressed and the oppressor. The author's proper use of characterization helped the researcher to get a clear view of how human trafficking has been depicted in the novel. The question that Lena poses to Madam Nancy depicts her innocence and ignorance about human trafficking in which she is a victim. She cannot get the answer from madam Nancy because she is already under the control of the traffickers who determine the next course of action in her circumstance.

The setting of this novel continues to bring out an elaborate depiction of human trafficking. The setting in Kampala where *Zura Maids* is located describes the lucrative and risky nature of this business. The author depicts human suffering as a profitable business in which the traffickers accumulate ill-gotten wealth from. For instance, Martina Maa, who has been imprisoned in Luzira women prison, is the owner of the *Zura Maids* those deals with human trade. *Zura Maids* is one of the companies under Victoria Group of companies, owned by Martina Maa, a human trafficker herself. Martina Maa had been imprisoned on charges of child abduction. Despite her imprisonment in Luzira, the *Zura Maids* business continues to boom in human trafficking of young girls. Martina's business partners, Mukwano and Tony continue collaborating with their agents up country for the continuity of human trafficking as their business in Kampala, up country as outside the country.

Characterization as part of the style enabled the researcher to learn that *Zura Maids* is the epicentre for human trafficking in Kampala. For instance, when Lena and Arthur are on a mission to rescue their sisters, Lilly and Molly respectively who are suspected to have also been *Trafficked* by Esther, they reveal a lot of information about human trafficking depictions in this novel. Lena fell into the hands of the traffickers once again during this mission. In this chapter, the researcher also discussed that human trafficking is a bloody business thriving on human greed.

The business owners of *Zura Maids* and managers are heartless, cruel, and selfish. When Martina Maa was sentenced for fifteen years to Luzira prison, Mukawano, her manger, worked hard to take over the business. In the process, Mukwano assassinates

Tony who had been the company lawyer and other fellow workers at *Zura Maids*. Mukwano kills his fellow workers in cold blood in order to take over Martina's business. The researchers noted that it is through characterization that the theme of human trafficking and how it affects the victims is depicted.

The behaviour and nature of the perpetrators of human traffickers are portrayed through character analysis in the novel. The researchers critically analysed those human traffickers are unkind and cruel to their victims, they violate the fundamental human rights of the victims, through exploitation. For instance, when they ask to know what has befallen them, they are denied information. When Lena asks the women that has led her into the dungeon, she is barked at, . "No questions! (p. 209) Madam Nancy said. In such a situation when Lena does not know the place where she is, and what is likely to happen, shows that she has no right at all, since she is already in the hands of human traffickers.

Human trafficking is also depicted at a recurrent experience of characters in this novel. Through characterization, the author depicts Lena, Ayugi as a double survivor of human trafficking. Lena is *Trafficked* from her home, Acokora to one of the brothels in Kampala where she burns the same brothel and she is sentenced for two years in Luzira women prison. She is *Trafficked* again when she is on a mission to rescue her young sister Lilly. The traffickers are brutal to the *Trafficked* and these *Trafficked* young girls are servile to the traffickers. The *Trafficked* characters relationship with the traffickers is a slave-master relationship, an indicator of post-colonialism problems. In otherwards, the traffickers are the agents of neo-colonialist's and the *Trafficked* are the colonised people of African origin, who serve as contraband goods heading for market.

Again, the setting of the novel continues to offer clear depictions of human trafficking. The victims are lured from deep remote areas to the city, where they had never been before. This excites them and exposes their ignorance about the impending danger. The *Trafficked* young girls are ignorant about the jobs that they had been promised in Kampala, they are simply led by the human traffickers' agents from up country. The post-

independence socio-economic and political failures which resulted into wars, desperation, unemployment among others, are looked at as key fuelling factors in the process of trafficking these innocent young girls who are equated to subalterns. The act of being recruited and taken to other places from their homes to brothels to be prepared through training for export as if they are commodities is dehumanizing and it equates them to mere trading merchandise. In this context we concur with Fanon (1967), who argues that "... colonialism is not a type of individual relations but the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people [by mental, physical, and spiritual force]" (p. 81).

The researchers also analysed the narrative point of view through which the story is told. The author uses the first-person point of view that includes the omniscient narrator and individual personal characters narrations. The author artistically uses the first-person narrative point of view to reveal the first-hand information to the researcher. This narrative style helped the researcher in depicting human trafficking as characters share their past and present experiences. The novel opens with a personal narrative of Lena Ayugi, the protagonist of the novel, expressing her joy for freedom at the end of her two years sentence in Luzira women prison thus she says:

"...my name is Lena. Lena Agugi. For the last time this April morning, it is my pleasure to remind you about me", Lena said.

We analysed that this kind of narrative provides first-hand information to the researcher in examining depictions of human trafficking in this novel through omniscient narrator, who enters the mind of characters, psychologizes them, and narrates what the characters want or intends to do. This narrative style is the mouth piece of the novel through which the author exposes and condemns human trafficking. The author through Lena, demonstrates how human trafficking affects the female gender in this novel. From this analysis therefore, the researchers argued that the author's depiction of human trafficking is partly through the narrative point of view. Part of the story is told in reminiscence, where Lena and other characters recount their experiences from their different backgrounds. For instance, Lena recounts her ordeal

experiences from her home in an internally displaced peoples camp in Acokara to a brothel in Kampala and to Luzira women prison and then back to Acokara, and later to a dungeon in Kampala again, it is through this narrative point of view that the researchers analysed human trafficking as a life long journey for the *Trafficked* characters in this novel.

Through characterization, again human trafficking in this novel re-echoes tenets of Marxist feminism theory as one of the theories used in this study. The theory posits women's oppression on the economic dependence on men in a male-centric society, Bryson, (1992) argues that capitalism continues to be an overcharging oppressor of women. Lena Ayugi and her fellow *Trafficked* young girls are socially and economically oppressed by their traffickers. It is this patriarchal system in society that makes the female gender become the victims of human trafficking in this novel.

In this context therefore the researchers examine that the author uses mainly two types of characters to depict the theme of human trafficking and exploitation. These characters are; the *Trafficked*, represented by Lena, Lilly, Amoding, Molly among other young girls and the traffickers represented by Martina maa, Esther, Mukwano among others that are involved in the management of *Zura Maids*, where the *Trafficked* young characters are taken to be prepared for commercial prostitution both locally and internationally, and their agents in different countries abroad. The traffickers are tricksters who convince the community that the *Trafficked* young people are in Kampala working as nannies and that they would be coming home if their jobs allowed them. Old Esther, who has recruited many young people, would pay numerous visits to the community looking for more youths to recruit into human trafficking. She would pay some money to the families of the *Trafficked* youths to show that they are working and that they had sent some money home thus;

"I don't even know what to say. My mind is so disturbed by the devil Esther" Lena said.

"That woman is evil. She even continues to deceive my family like that? She takes us into slavery and uses money as a cover up" (p. 57).

The researcher argues that Lena's action of burning a brothel in Kawempe is a clear depiction of human trafficking in the novel. Lena becomes a mouthpiece of the author to tell a story of human trafficking as a social evil that affects young girls as victims. It is also a demonstration that the conditions of the *Trafficked* characters are worse and they deserve better conditions. The author portrays the spirited resistance of the *Trafficked* young girls against human trafficking thus;

"a place where I was being held hostage. A brothel. I burnt it so that I and my friends could escape" Lena said (p. 11).

It can also be analysed that human trafficking is a difficult business to fight, deeply rooted in society, with various networks all over the country and abroad. The traffickers have influence over the courts of law to cover up their business. For instance, when Lena sets the brothel ablaze, her effort to liberate herself and her fellow innocent *Trafficked* young girls is not recognized. She is indeed charged with arson, convicted, and sentenced to Luzira prison. Lena could have helped the government to fight against human trafficking if she got a fair hearing in the court of law. If Martina Maa had been well investigated during her trial, many young girls who had been *Trafficked* and kept in various brothels in Kampala would have been rescued earlier than Lena's second attempt to rescue her sister.

Through characterization, the author portrays corruption as a system through which human trafficking thrives in society. For instance, Mukwano bribes the police detectives to investigate a false robbery at *Zura Maids* to cover up the assassination he has made on his fellow workers in his attempt to take over *Zura Maids*. Still on corruption, the traffickers connive with the immigration officers at Entebbe International Airport to traffic the young girls abroad where their agents are always waiting for them at different airports.

Through her artistic narrative style, the author clearly depicts human trafficking in this novel. The narrator reveals that Lena burns a brothel in which she has been kept with other young girls. The setting of the novel now changes from the brothel to Luzira prison. The novel opens when Lena has been

released from the prison where she has been for long. Through her narrative, life in Luzira prison is not good, she is thankful to God for keeping her safe and alive. From Luzira prison, Lena goes to Kampala where she meets Arthur Mubende, her former attorney who helps her to get what to eat and money for transport to Acokora to reunite with her family.

The setting of this novel gives a broader and detailed depiction of human trafficking. For instance, from Kampala, Lena heads for home. Upon reaching home, Lena realizes that her young sister, Lilly has also been *Trafficked* by the same old Esther who is an agent of the *Zura Maids* in Kampala. The setting then changes from Acokora to Kampala, Lena disguises as Maggie and gets a job at *Zura Maids*. This leads her into a dungeon, where she is rescued with other young girls who are being prepared for export as if they are trade merchandise. It is therefore, important to note that through setting, the author exposes depictions of human trafficking and exploitation in this epistle. At different places, the *Trafficked* characters experience different exploitation and mistreatment. It is therefore important to note that setting contributes greatly to the depictions of human trafficking and exploitation in the novel *Zura Maids*.

Through Arthur, the author of *Zura Maids* depicts another *Trafficked* young girl, Molly, a sister to Arthur. In his pursuit to offer pro bono services to Lena, during an arson case, Arthur Mubende is also looking for his sister. In conversation with Lena after her acquittal from Luzira prison, Arthur deeply explains Molly's disappearance. Thus;

"Well, I helped you because I . . . I have a cause. I once had a sister. My young sister, Molly. . ." Arthur said.

Arthur goes on to depict human trafficking in the process of rescuing his own sister as he meets many people who face the same human trafficking and exploitation scam. Through his narration, the researcher realized that human trafficking involves both girls and boys, young and old. Thus, Arthur narrates;

"Yes, she was twelve and in primary seven at Buganda Road Primary school. One day, eleven years ago, she did not return from school. We

searched everywhere. We are still searching. It was right before that infamous story of child trafficking broke in the news all over the nation. We have only lived with suspicion and speculations. Some said she was abducted, maybe Trafficked to God knows where. Some said she was perhaps sacrificed. I chose to believe she is still alive. And I am still searching and, in the process, helping boys and girls who suffer similar fate”, Arthur said. “Well, there are many young boys and girls out there who need help. A lot of help” he continued (p. 36).

The authors use of characterization helped the researchers to reveal human trafficking and exploitation at *Zura Maids*. It is through Arthur that the entire business deals and dynamics at the *Zura Maids* are clearly depicted. Materialism and greed that result into assassinations of workers at the *Zura Maids* by Mukwano, who tries to own the company alone are all exposed by Arthur when he gets a job as a messenger. Mukwano tries to hide the death of Tony and other company workers; Arthur reports the human trafficking scam to the police. This culminates into the arrest of Mukwano and all other workers at *Zura Maids*. Based on Marxist Feminist literary theory, (Lynn, 2020, p 83) the researchers argues that Mukwano and his fellow male workers take advantage of Martina’s imprisonment to take control of her business. The researchers concurred with Eisenstein (1978) who avers that oppression is a result of capitalist organization and is based on lack of power and control of proletariat worker who creates surplus value for the bourgeoisie, especially women (Eisenstein, 1978). It is male supremacy and patriarchal system in a capitalist society coupled with a personal greed that Mukwano is determined to take control of Martina’s business at all costs and in the process, he murders his fellow workers in cold blood.

Based on the role of characterization in this novel, Arthur Mubende is the champion male character that are fighting for the liberation of women in this novel. The author used Arthur Mubende to show an urgent need to liberate women from bondage of human trafficking and sex slavery in this novel. Being a lawyer and a human right activist, Arthur decides to offer pro bono services to the poor *Trafficked* young girls. He is also on a mission to rescue his own sister Molly, who has gone missing

some years ago. The author creatively uses characterization through Arthur to demonstrate that it is possible to fight human trafficking and exploitation, if everyone in the society plays the same role as Arthur Mubende.

The researchers analysed the role of characterization in this novel and revealed that the author’s use of many characters continues to depict human trafficking and exploitation and its scope in this novel. When Arthur gets a job at the *Zura Maids*, he accesses vital information from numerous files of the company; he later shares this information to Odwar, a retired police officer, who later helps him to report the matter to the IGP for apprehension of human trafficking scam. Arthur observes;

“Zura Maids is the oldest of the VG firms. Its publicly known as a domestic labour sourcing firm. I would say it’s the rock of Martina’s twenty million US dollars” worth of estate. The largest and most profitable” (p. 246-7).

The omniscient narrator recounts Arthur’s experience when he gets files that contain the lists of the *Trafficked* girls at the *Zura Maids*. He pulled out a file cabinet by the desk, ran through the files, and pulled out one labelled *Zura Maids: Year 2*. He studied it. The first page had the word ‘DRC’ running across it. Arthur ran his eyes down the second page. A Mr. Dumbe was listed as the official agent of the *Zura*, followed by several pages of names of girls who had been sent to the DRC. Arthur felt the urge to study the names; perhaps he could identify Lena’s Lilly. Identify his Molly, but there was no time. He flipped through the remaining pages- Sudan, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Malaysia, India, USA, China, and UK. The list is endless; each showing an official agent and a long list of girls received that year. The researchers, therefore, argued that the narrative point of view played a pivotal role in the analysis of human trafficking depictions in this novel.

The information that Arthur gets from the *Zura Maids* is an indictment that human trafficking and exploitation has been taking place and its scope is large because *Zura Maids* is dealing with many countries. Through the narrative, the author has been able to enhance the scope of human trafficking in the novel by exposing different countries in Africa and overseas, where the *Trafficked* and the

exploited young girls are exported to. The researchers have been able to know the various countries where the *Trafficked* girls are exported as illegal immigrants.

The author portrays the *Zura Maids* as the most lucrative business of the VG enterprises that brings in a lot of profits. Arthur observes that human trafficking and exploitation operates both internally and international and the traffickers operate in a criminal manner. Arthur shares to Muzee Odwar, thus;

“The VG reaps profits close to five hundred thousand dollars annually from its domestic supply and close to one and a half million dollars for exported girl.... and most of all that money is dirty money! Money got from the suffering of innocent girls”. Arthur said. *“They operate like a criminal organization, Mzee. They are secretive, recruiting girls under the cover of looking for thousands, supplying some to brothels here in Kampala, training thousands in secret places and then trafficking them abroad to serve as sex slaves”*, he said (p. 247).

The debate within contemporary African Literature; Depictions of Human trafficking and Exploitation in *Trafficked* (2008)

Trafficked (2008) is novel that deals with the issues of human trafficking. Characters are *Trafficked* through a series of reminiscences in the novel. Nneoma, the protagonist of the novel shows dehumanization that goes with human trafficking, the deceit, the lies, the slavery, and servitude that goes hand in hand with human trafficking and exploitation because all *Trafficked* female characters end up as sex objects to men; the pimps use the *Trafficked* characters as prostitutes. The novel that is credited with twenty-nine chapters has each chapter unfolding the series and circumstances of each of the characters well depicted.

In the novel after a slight hiccup in her relationship with Ofomata, Nneoma decides to leave her home town in Ihete-Agu and upon hearing from a friend that there are teaching vacancies in the United Kingdom and she is to be introduced to the agents in charge, Nneoma goes straight to her friend and they both travel down to Lagos to meet with the agents. The researchers noted that it is through

characterization that the author depicts the key factors that facilitate human trafficking in this novel. Setting is one of the vehicles through which the author portrays factors and circumstances that persuade girls into human trafficking and exploitation.

In the novel, *Trafficked*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, weaves a story of the *Trafficked* young women from Lagos to London through Italy in search of jobs aided and abetted by the rich human traffickers. The story is narrated in the third person point of view, with the use of flashbacks among other narrative techniques. The novel is set from different places in Nigeria, Italy, and London. The author focusses on the social contexts in the *Trafficked* characters country of origin which include among others; poverty, corruption, lack of job opportunities, incessant strike actions, violence, insecurity that led them to be *Trafficked* to Europe.

The author also focusses on the experience of the *Trafficked* characters in the diaspora. Upon their arrival, the *Trafficked* characters realize that they are *Trafficked* s commercial sex workers to slave for their masters in Europe. The author also depicts how these characters are shuffled as articles of trade being sold and brought from one person to another and from one place to another.

This novel also centres on the depiction of the *Trafficked* characters after their escape from slavery and their deportation back to Nigeria as deportees. The writer depicts human trafficking in the novel in the context of post-colonial confrontation with a version of slavery. She presents the enslaver on one hand and the negligent society is implicated for its failures, on the other hand. The society is negligent in a sense that the motives and plots of the villains, the human traffickers in the novel are not apprehended.

Through setting, human trafficking depictions are well portrayed in the novel. The novel is in different places; it starts in Ihete-Agus, Nneoma’s village to Lagos, Nigeria and then to London through Italy. This setting is effective because it offers different experiences undergone by the *Trafficked* characters in the hands of rich human traffickers. The protagonist of the novel, Nneoma and her fellow *Trafficked* young girls are lured to go to Italy for

jobs and if they wanted, they would go to London thus she laments;

“I went to Italy with a woman who promised to help me and some other girls to get jobs, she said that it was easy to get good jobs there, and that we could migrate to Britain after a while if we wanted” (p 118).

The setting changes from Lagos, Nigeria to Rome, Italy from where the *Trafficked* characters realize that they are in the hands of human traffickers. Upon their arrival the *Trafficked* characters discover that their affairs and their lives are manipulated by human traffickers thus Nneoma grieves;

“There is a woman called Madam Dollar, nothing comes between her and money. She owns us and the men whom we call captain, is her bodyguard. She keeps us prisoners in her flat. Life is hell in Rome. We are always walking at night selling sex to Italians and foreigners”, (p. 129).

The setting as a style helped the researchers to understand how human trafficking issues unfold to different places. We argue that the *Trafficked* characters are completely devastated by the life they live in a new environment in diaspora. They lose their identity as they are forced to take on a new culture, a new ideology of prostitution which the colonized has imposed upon them.

Characterization is another technique used by the author to depict human trafficking in the novel. Through the use of the first-person point of view, different characters narrate their personal experiences in different places. While Nneoma, Efe and Alice among other *Trafficked* young girls represent the *Trafficked* young Nigerians, Eddie and Maria represent the local human traffickers in Nigeria. Baron, Madam Dollar, Madam Gold among others represent human traffickers at the international level (Europe), where the young Nigerians are *Trafficked* to.

Through character introspection, Nneoma the protagonist of the novel complains about her mistreatment and that of other *Trafficked* young girls in the hands of their exploiter, Baron as she laments;

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

The researchers argue that in-depth character analysis in this novel played a significant role in depicting human trafficking and exploitation in this novel. The characters are portrayed as victims of circumstances who have fallen into the snares of the human traffickers. These characters have become preys of human traffickers who run heartless syndicates and avaricious agencies that specialize in human trafficking for international sex slavery. Through character’s experiences, the researchers noted that human trafficking in this novel, like the other novel that form the basis of this research article, human trafficking is mainly in forms such as forced commercial sex trafficking and modern-day slavery among others. The characters are juxtaposed in two groups, the *Trafficked*, exploited (colonized/subalterns), and the traffickers, exploiters (colonizers). The narrator describes the *Trafficked* characters as naïve and gullible. They could hardly suspect the hidden agenda of their traffickers. In a dialogue with Nneoma, Efe reveals she was unsuspectingly tricked and lured into human trafficking by an agency that promised to engage both men and women for descent employment abroad, Efe narrates;

“One day I saw an advertisement in the newspaper while I was on a visit to my cousin in Lagos. It asked 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, especially during the military regime”, I responded to the advertisement without my cousin’s knowledge. The office seemed perfectly normal. Quite a number of people were interviewed on the same day. Some were rejected, but I was selected. None of the men who were interviewed were taken. That would have alerted me to danger, but I barely gave it a thought at that time. Anyway, before long all the girls-ten of us were given a

travel schedule. We took an oath to work for the agency until we paid our debts. They claimed that had spent a lot of money getting our passports and tickets". Well to cut a long story short, we were taken to Italy and ended up in Palemo. It was terrible. I was sold to a woman called Madame Gold, a Nigerian. She was vivacious. She used us shamelessly, made us walk the streets every night" (p 98-99).

According to Efe's narration, the *Trafficked* girls are ignorant about human trafficking and because of unemployment and bad governance in their country, they end up being *Trafficked*. The researchers argue that human trafficking and exploitation thrives on deception and greed of the traffickers, who capitalize on the prevailing conditions in the society. The researchers also analysed that human trafficking is fuelled by patriarchal system in society which puts men in an upper position and leaves women at the peripheral position whereby women are dominated by men. This rhymes with Marxist Feminist literary theory. The idea of trafficking women only concurs with Beechey (2008:68) who asserts that "women are conceptualized as being the minority group within the dominant society", (p. 68). The researchers again revealed that Efe's narration highlighted the issue of sex slavery and objectification of the *Trafficked* girls in this novel. The researchers analysed that characterization is an important aspect of style in the analysis of human trafficking and exploitation as depicted in this novel.

Nneoma equally left her home with the prospect of getting a lucrative teaching appointment in the United Kingdom, as she narrates her experience;

"For personal reasons, I fled from home one Friday morning without telling my family. A friend and classmate had told me some weeks before that some people had helped her secure a teaching appointment in the United Kingdom and she could come with her. . . so, I head for her hometown, which is near mine, to find out if the invitation is still open. It is, and we travel to Lagos together to meet her sponsors. In no time, they get passports and flight tickets for us, and keep them. They show us pictures of the schools where we'll be teaching and gives us

appointment letters signed by people with English names", (p 126-27).

The researchers analysed that the author has made human trafficking and exploitation crystal clear through both setting and individual character's narration. The researcher's critical analysis of the characters experiences, both traffickers and the *Trafficked*, showed that human trafficking is depicted as a greatest human rights violation in this novel. The *Trafficked* characters are subjected to inhuman practices against their wishes by the human traffickers. They are sold as sex slaves to men and pimps who mistreats them. They are used as sex dolls hence violating their basic human rights (freedom of choice). Most *Trafficked* characters end up in an unfamiliar environment where they could not speak or understand their traffickers/owner's language of communication. Their passports are taken and kept by their traffickers or agents as a way of controlling them. For instance, Nneoma, the protagonist in this novel is *Trafficked* from Nigeria to Rome; she was bought by Madame Dollar, who seriously subjected her to sex slavery before selling her to Baron. Thus, Nneoma narrates;

"So I walk the streets of Rome for Madame Dollar for three years and still she claims I have not repaid my debt. There is no hope for escape. I do not speak Italian. I know no one in the city. I fear the police like plague as I don't have valid documents. So I remain with Madam Dollar, biding my time, dreaming of freedom. Then help seems to come in the person of a man called Baron. He takes me and two other girls to London and says he rescued us, in fact he has bought us from Madame Dollar, thus cancelling debt" (p. 131-132).

The authors continuous use of characterization helped the researchers to investigate how the theme of human trafficking and exploitation is portrayed in this novel. The researcher made a critical character analysis to reveal how human trafficking and exploitation is well depicted in this novel. In this novel, the author exposes the exploitative nature of human traffickers through the use of characterization. Nneoma, the protagonist of this novel, was weary to men and she hated their exploitation. Through her personal narrative, her plight and her fellow *Trafficked* young girls deeply

depict human trafficking and exploitation in this novel. During sex slavery many girls are tortured, raped, beaten and others killed because there is no hope or means of escape for these *Trafficked* young girls. The human traffickers are brutal, merciless, sadist and oppressive against the *Trafficked* characters. For instance, Nneoma describes her ordeal experience with Baron, a well-known pimp who bought her from Madame Dollar;

“He rapes and beats me; I refuse when customers demand oral sex or anal sex and insist that they use condoms and I am sometimes assaulted for this. Baron locks me up and doesn’t allow me to go out except when he takes me with him” (p. 132).

Through Baron’s character, human trafficking and exploitation is depicted as total violation of human rights. Nneoma’s right is trampled on by Baron, a human trafficker, who owns her as a slave. This also concurs with an assertion that human trafficking and exploitation are modern day slavery, Logan, (2009). Male characters are portrayed as oppressors, exploiters and merciless. Akachi’s use of characterization is so effective that human trafficking is vividly depicted in this novel. The author portrays traffickers both men and women as villains and the *Trafficked* characters as victims. This enables the researchers to analyse how human trafficking and exploitation is depicted in this novel.

The researchers also analysed that the story is told in reminisces. A number of flashbacks have been used throughout the novel. It is through these flashbacks that the author depicts human trafficking and exploitation in this novel. The author blends the past and present through a number of flashbacks which informed the researchers understanding of human trafficking and exploitation as a serious social evil in society. Through her artistic creativity, Akachi depicts the Nigerian society with its post-independence failures, which force young girls into exploitation and trafficking in this novel.

CONCLUSION

The study analysed the theme of human trafficking and exploitation in Africa using selected contemporary African literature novels. To achieve this, the study examines the depictions of human

trafficking and exploitation through style. It concluded that the authors of the selected novels are well aware of human trafficking and exploitation in their societies. The study concluded that the authors of the selected novels raise awareness among the readers that human trafficking is a social evil that affects female gender most.

The study found out a number of factors that contribute to human trafficking and exploitation. The study blamed the post-independence African leaders for being responsible for human trafficking. These leaders failed to plan and provide for the people. The study analysed these factors in the context of Uganda and Nigeria, where the texts under study are set from. In *Zura Maids*, (2018) for example, the war that displaced the population, unemployment, and illiteracy, largely influence the *Trafficked* and the exploited girls. In *Trafficked*, (2008), lack of job opportunities, corruption, general public riots and strikes in schools and universities among others are responsible for human trafficking.

Finally, the study concluded that the authors of the selected novels have successfully depicted the theme of human trafficking in their novels through setting, characterization, narration, flashbacks among their narrative styles appropriate to convey their message loud and clear about human trafficking and exploitation. The researchers concluded that the depictions of human trafficking and exploitation in these novels are clarion calls sounded by the authors to make their audiences aware of the heinous face of human trafficking and exploitation and so mobilise to fight it.

Recommendations

We would wish to see in-depth study in future on human trafficking and exploitation reflected in other genres of literature such as; Drama, Poetry, and short story to investigate further the theme of human trafficking. This is because this study is limited to contemporary African novels and yet other genres may also contain human trafficking and exploitation issues.

Our other recommendation is that the Ministry of Gender and Social Development together with the Ministry of internal affairs should interest themselves in the fight against human trafficking by

registering and regulating all labour exporting companies in Uganda to curtail human exploitation and trafficking. This can be done by implementing the anti-trafficking legislations made by the parliament. These ministries should sensitize the public about human trafficking and exploitation and its related consequences to create awareness.

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