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Fictionalizing the New Nigerian Migrant Narrative: Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale*

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Abstract

There has always been the diaspora element in Nigerian literature, probably beginning from the 18th century slave narratives produced by the likes of Olaudah Equiano. The connection between the 'local' and the 'international' in the national literature was tenaciously pursued by Nigerian writers in the 20th century, especially as it concerned the unravelling of the globalist aspects of the emerging African modernist sensibilities. Among other 'modern' examples of the increasing prominence of the outside world on the Nigerian social reality as reflected in Nigerian fiction are Obi Okonkwo's representations of the intersections between the local and the foreign in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and Ada's resiliently 'gendered' global self in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*. But it is the subject of sex-trafficking that has exploded the Nigerian 'transatlantic' narrative, becoming in the process, one of the foundational directions of the country's 21st century imaginative writing. Among the writers whose enterprises have helped to inscribe this consciousness are Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (*Trafficked*), Jude Dibia (*Unbridled*), Chris Abani (*Becoming Abigail*), and of course, Bisi Ojediran (*A Daughter for Sale*), the subject of this paper. Ojediran's novel, despite its very robust imaginative stature as some kind of detective masterpiece, is perhaps the most well researched novel on the subject. What does Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale* contribute to the emerging world canon of the literature, and indeed art on sex trafficking? What does it say about the postcolonial condition of Africa, especially as it affects the emergent social reality of sex trafficking? How does Ojediran's novel engage those other Nigerian/African narratives on the subject in an intertextual conversation?

Introduction

One remarkable feature of new Nigerian fiction is what has been termed "the localization of the international and the internationalization of the local."[1]By this is meant both the contemporary predilection of the

national literature to speak to social and political issues and contexts of world (rather than African or Nigerian) significance and how this literature, through its globalist posture, constructs for itself place and space in the world literary canon.. A larger degree of the propensity of the Nigerian (and, of course, the African) to connect with the outside world has been 'transatlantic' in nature, especially in the explosive dispensation of the 21st century.

The idea of 'transatlantic' is, however, far from a 21st century phenomenon for the African. Much of the continent's understanding and appreciation of the term would always be linked to the unpalatable experience of the transatlantic slave trade[2] which ran for three centuries, forever redefining what it means to be African. The Atlantic Ocean had provided the platform for the most massive human translocation in history, and had set the ambience for the greatest tragedy of dignity ever. Also known as the 'triangular trade,'[3] the transatlantic slave trade saw Africa lose about thirty million of its people to the other parts of the world, across the Atlantic, in circumstances of extreme exploitation and dehumanization.

Interestingly, the African heritage in literature, which now ranks among the most illustrious in the world, has its roots in and owes a huge debt to this singular experience of racial humiliation. Exposed to languages with fully developed writing systems, a handful of ex-slaves were motivated to express their experiences in print. This is how names like Olaudah Equiano *(The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African* [1789]); Phyllis Wheatley (*Poems on Various Subjects* [1773]); Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, (*A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars of the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince* [1770]); Ottobah Cugoano (*Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* [1787]); Frederick Douglass (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* [1845]), among others, became dominant features in African (and allied) literary history. It is against the backdrop of the contribution of the 'slave narrators'[4] to the establishment and development of modern African writing that S.E. Ogude expresses a critical concern:

> Unfortunately modern African writers are hardly aware of the traditions that have shaped their art. And they are less

> likely to claim affinity with the eighteenth century black men of letters. Yet the story of the development of black writing in modern European languages is part of the history of the black contact with the modern European world. It is, in its less attractive aspect, the history of the Slave Trade and the brutalities which accompanied it. (*Genius in Bondage*, 3)

Perhaps the example of Equiano has been the most outstanding among Africans, owing to his obvious links with the modern Nigerian tradition in fiction, where he has been noted as a possible influence on Nigeria's most celebrated fiction writer, Chinua Achebe. Achebe himself would characterize Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative* as "a beautifully written document which among other things, set down for the Europe of his time something of the life and habit of his people in Africa in an attempt to counteract the lies and slander invented by some Europeans to justify the Slave Trade" (*Morning Yet* 59). Achebe would, in the spirit of the temperament attributed to Equiano above, make a career out of defending and reinforcing the African dignity and integrity.

If the kind of material produced by Equiano and his group of ex-slaves qualifies as 'transatlantic' literature in today's assessment, then in the 21st century age of globalization (by the way, the transatlantic slave trade has been described as 'the first system' of globalization) then the work of present day writers has exploded the genre into a major compartment of the modern world literature. Ironically enough, 'slavery' is still at the core of transactions which have informed the emergence of the new transatlantic African/Nigerian novel. Alongside the other great instrument of exploitation—colonialism—slavery has found a veritable way of reinventing itself in new world terms. While oppression remains the principal denominator, and the *oppressor* and the *oppressed* roughly retain their former identities, neoslavery manipulates socio-cultural, historical and economic indices to present a markedly different rule of engagement—the African now consciously wants to be enslaved. Taking a cue from Walter Rodney's thesis about the outside world's contribution to Africa's underdevelopment,[5] Ezechi Onyerionwu explains a situation where slavery and colonialism now appear to be in the reverse gear, even though to similar devastating effect:

> It is within the context of the socio-political and economic crises engendered for Africa and the African that the continent's history of dependency has no end in sight, and can only take new forms to perpetuate the inevitable. The story of Africa is now the story of hunger, starvation, disease, leadership directionlessness, wars, terrorism, corruption, and general under-development and disillusionment. And the mass exodus of Africans from their motherland in search of these securities that have infernally eluded them at home, courtesy of the devastation of enabling structures, becomes not just imminent, but a cause for contemporary global concern (*Irony and Reverse Colonialism* 2-3).

Although the world's mass-migration narrative is now much bigger than the African predicament as the Middle East and the Arab world boils, Africa is still very much in the centre of a new world emergency. For the average African today, the other side of the Atlantic, especially Europe and the Americas, have become choice survival destinations dangling promises of a good life, and it hardly matters if some kind of slavery is part of the entire package. It is mainly the overestimation of the characters' chances of survival and the opportunities for the realization of their dream life (or life dreams), and the tragic disillusionment that comes with it, that engages the new African transatlantic novel.

Among the signature themes of this emergent direction of African fiction are identity, physical and mental subjugation and disenfranchisement, and the politics of location/translocation/ dislocation. It is the expert handling of these themes, and with the kind of narrative resilience and courage hardly seen in African literature of previous epochs that the new African transatlantic novel has been established as perhaps the fictional fulcrum of new African writing.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's *Americanah* (2013), for instance, possesses all the trappings of a finely-honed African transatlantic classic, dramatizing and narrativising the bold templates of the new African migrant story. Set both in London, England and in the United States of America, Adichie gives flesh and blood to the well-known dilemma of the African migrant, who like his predecessor African slave receives the due of an inferior being in full doses, in spite of the vaunted tempering of

modern day civilization. Adichie's major female character, Ifemelu, who like Adichie herself is smart and ideologically resilient, sees through the façade of race tolerance bravely displayed by the American society. She invariably arrives at the conclusion that even the effervescent African American civil rights movements of the mid- 20th century did little to close the social gap between slave descendant and freeborn, and to douse the supreme legacy of racism that slavery instituted. Adichie's major male character, Obinze, through whom she provides a United Kingdom version of the subject, could even afford to justify his circumstances through admirable historical theorizing:

> The wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of Black and brown people from countries created by Britain. Yet he understood. It had to be comforting, this denial of history. (*Americanah* 321)

Thus, one major testimonial of transatlantic literature, is that the ghosts and legacies of past transatlantic transactions (that is slavery and colonialism) never die. They remain insatiate and menacing, taking every opportune moment to avenge for a previous disruption of world social order. In other words, the producers of this kind of literature would readily deploy it as an instrument of protest, of *writing back* to history.

Sex Trafficking: The Menace of a New Transatlantic Slavery

On my return flight from the 41st edition of African Literature Association Conference in Bayreuth in early last June, where I presented a paper on sex trafficking in new Nigerian literature, the in-flight entertainment I chanced upon was Pierre Morel's *Taken* (2008). This film is about Bryan Mills (played by Liam Neeson), a retired CIA field operative, whose daughter has been kidnapped by a ruthless Albanian sex trafficking syndicate in Paris. Although Mills has many personal scores to settle with Lenore, the mother of his daughter, who is now married to

Stuart, a billionaire businessman, he undertakes this very dangerous rescue adventure for the love of his daughter. As he gets into the thick of action, he realizes that what he comes against is far bigger than a gang of amateur kidnappers; he is faced with the towering might of a most formidable world criminal organization with immense transnational political and economic interests and connections. He is exhausted, bruised and battered far beyond the magnitude of his expectations as he chases the criminals. But thanks to a combination of his CIA experience, his fighting and shooting abilities, and a generous sprinkling of luck, he is able to save his teenage daughter from destruction at the bloom of life.

There are a number of implications in the above reference to *Taken* for me and the present essay. 1. The Transatlantic sex trade has grown beyond Africa, and its socio-economic failures which enable such criminal exploitation of its peoples. If the step-daughter of an American billionaire private jet-owner like Stuart can fall victim to a modern-day transatlantic malaise, then everyone, everywhere is vulnerable. 2. The level of organization of the operational networks of this burgeoning trade suggests that it has built a gigantic economy for itself, any threat to which would be met with stiff, decisive, and even deadly resistance. This also means that it enjoys substantial socio-political influence and deep interest of powerful patrons. 3. It could be argued that one of the reasons for which *Taken* scores a major expository point on the global menace of sex trafficking is the investigative/detective format it takes. The set text for this paper, Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale* (2006) employs the same technique, with an investigative journalist as protagonist.

That sex trafficking (or sex slavery) can now constitute a significant multimedia exploration should not be surprising. Functional art thrives on intense societal anomaly. This is why Lucien Goldmann, distinguished literary critic and Marxist theoretician, holds that these kinds of circumstances "are particularly favourable to the birth of great works of art and of literature because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of the great widening of affective and intellectual horizons that they provoke' ("Dialectical Materialism," 50). Human Trafficking, especially its sex trade variant, much like its historical transatlantic antecedents, qualify as a contemporary global siege. For the United Nations, human trafficking is as heinous a crime as

any other, and as grave a violation of human rights. The UN is apt in describing what constitutes human trafficking.

> … The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.[8]

The global battle against human/sex trafficking grows fiercer with each passing day. Governments, world organizations, non-governmental outfits, international security agencies, etc, have all joined the war. But like in the case of drugs, it appears it is a losing war.

Nigeria has, over the years, come to occupy a strategic place in the human/sex trafficking conversation. The country does not just serve as a veritable recruitment ground for sex slaves, it is a strong and strategic base for the formidable mafia operations which specialises in trafficking young girls to Europe and other parts of the world for purposes of prostitution. As I have suggested in a previous paper of similar direction, one big reason that informs Nigeria's large scale participation in this inglorious 'neo'-transatlantic slave trade is its "perennially embattled socio-economic process, whose devastation has been serially orchestrated by Nigeria's history of uninspiring leadership."[7] The outcome of this situation is that many of the country's productive population hardly finds hope of economic survival within its shores. Encouraged by this socio-psychological anomaly, individuals of dubious characters devised a means of profiting from the circumstances, forming what has now become some of the 21st century world's most vicious criminal organizations.

Nigeria also plays a leading role in the fictional representation of the scourge of sex trafficking. This may be an offshoot of the country's dominant profile in African literature, and the very significant interest of Nigeria in the 'globalization' of African literature concomitant with the

emergence of the global age. As Abiola Irele reiterates, African literature specializes in "expressing the tensions set up in our modern awareness by the varied and often contradictory elements of the collective experience…" (*The African Imagination* 212). But I have also argued that the deep involvement of Nigerian literature with this subject is perhaps "a price that [the country] has to pay for Nigeria's leading role in a new world predicament" ("The New Nigerian Novel" 6). In the Nigerian sex trafficking oeuvre are such well received novels as Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2009), which won the coveted NLNG Prize for Literature in 2012; Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008); Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009); Ifeoma Chinweuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2009), Ikechukwu Asika's *Tamara* (2013), among others.

But what makes our set text for this paper, Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter For Sale*, most remarkable is that its detective outlook, which affords it the ambience, like the film *Taken*, to trace the contours of the sex trafficking trade to the detail. Thus, Ojediran's novel provides us with a heart-warming mix of the realistic/topical mode and the detective/thriller sensibility. Among other deductions that can be made from Ojediran's choice of this narrative outlook, is the conviction that the fight against trafficking requires much more than declarations by world bodies, proclamations by national governments and admonitions by religious leaders. The response to a global crime this organised has to be strategic, investigative, intelligence-oriented to be defeated.

In *A Daughter For Sale*, Peter Abel, an investigative journalist with *Zodiac*, one of Nigeria's leading newspapers undertakes a perilous adventure with the aim of saving a trafficked girl to whom he is emotionally attached. Other motivations for this high-risk manoeuvre include averaging the gruesome death of a fellow *Zodiac* journalist and friend, who is slain in cold blood for writing a story about sex trafficking in his country; to expose the evil cabal responsible for dislocating the maturative processes of young girls, and bringing them to book. Abel discovers that he is up against a very complex network of dare-devil killers almost as soon as he begins his investigation. One of his informants is murdered in cold blood and he narrowly escapes death himself in a well-planned assassination attempt as he tries to protect Alice, a young girl in danger of being trafficked. When Alice is eventually whisked abroad, Abel decides to make his pursuit international, of course

with the full support of his highly cooperative boss at *Zodiac*, Chief Benson, who also understands the potential impact of such a big story on the reputation of his newspaper. In an extraordinary display of investigative resilience, Abel chases the traffickers to the Canary Islands in Spain, Mali in West Africa, London UK and finally Washington D.C, USA before he is able to finally snatch Alice from their jaws.

Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale* possesses all the major elements of detective fiction,—"The greater powers of observation and superior mind of the detective" and "the startling and unexpected denouement, in which the detective reveals how the identity of the culprit was ascertained" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Online). Ojediran presents Peter Abel's profile as fitting for this assignment, as the best investigative journalist in the land with every required attribute—impeccable intelligence, sharp instincts, admirable fighting and shooting abilities, a fiercely articulate mind capable of high levels of strategic thinking, a mastery of the principles of advanced disguise, a very likeable personality and a strong moral fibre. And no doubt, the novel succeeds in illuminating the subject of a major transatlantic predicament by featuring a super-protagonist with an incredible omniscient mandate. Ojediran simply moves the narrative by effectively 'moving' Peter Abel.

First of all, Ojediran convinces us of Peter Abel's emotional constitution which is positively disposed to the assignment at hand. He is not only passionate about being the best in his job, and helping his newspaper, *Zodiac*, become the leading name in the business, he is also acutely aware and sensitive to his role as both the watchdog and the conscience of his society. He has genuine intentions about the restoration of respect for human rights in his country. Thus, although he has found reasonable material success in his profession, his motivation for the pursuit of professional excellence transcends the banal. Not only does Abel consider himself as having the emotional duty of avenging the death of his friend Tunde at the hands of the trafficking syndicate, and saving young and defenceless Alice for her helpless mother, he is also aware of his responsibility to the larger Nigerian society. On learning more about the transnational sex trade and his country's inglorious contributions to it through the internet, he resolves that this is one war he has to fight.

Ojediran's narrator tells us at the height of Abel's reflections: "But somebody had to speak for these girls. And Abel was determined to

be that somebody" (33). The more he found out about Nigeria's role in international prostitution, the more his resolve to do something about it tightens.

> He became absorbed in the story of a Nigerian woman who had been found murdered in Turin, Italy. She had entered the country on a fake visa and was working there as a prostitute. Nobody attended her burial or contacted the police about the case. No family member came to visit her grave. The killer got off with a light sentence, because nobody objected when the authorities allowed him to plead guilty to some lesser charge. Disposable people, Abel thought as the phone range. (49)

When he eventually makes his case to be supported in his proposal to investigate the transatlantic menace to his boss at *Zodiac*, the substance of his logic illustrates the extent of his conviction:

> We hear and see most of these stories daily, but we ignore them. In a country groaning under so many problems, we tend to overlook trafficking in innocents. That is where I go next. I have spent too much time investigating government scandals. This is a much greater one when you consider the cost in human lives…
>
> The average age of women trafficked from Nigeria to Europe is fifteen…There are about eighty-thousand prostitutes in Italy and neighbouring country. Out of these, sixty to eighty percent are Nigerians. Think of the implications for HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. (59)

Through Abel's spirited argument, Ojediran perhaps performs two of the cardinal responsibilities of the artist—sensitization and conscientization. Abel, in other words, could as well be talking to the individual member of the audience as he sermonizes about the need for everyone else to adopt his standpoint on what he describes as "this slave trade" (174). One of the means through which Abel intends to "bring down" the sex trafficking syndicate, after all, is to construct a story, a journalistic narrative which would "leave a strong emotional impression" on the

reader. In Abel's calculation, "a single human story" would definitely be more effective than the story of "the thousands of women trafficked abroad," which "would only be a string of statistics. Just numbers" (184-185).

Of course, Ojediran does not seek to treat sex trafficking as another vice that dropped out of the skies. Neither does he want to explain away his country's deep participation in it as a mere existential coincidence. All through *A Daughter for Sale*, the impression of a socio-political and economic backdrop to the malaise is unmistakable. If crime, even organised crime, is a feature of almost every society on the face of the earth, then its prevalence level would definitely depend on the quality of life within the given community of human beings. Thus, Ojediran does not shy away from the fact that the real and remote undercurrents for sex trafficking in Nigeria are the same seasons for which the country is fighting a losing war against other forms of moral failure, societal indiscipline and crime. Nigeria's profile as a failed state in socio-political and economic terms plays a heavy role in encouraging sex trafficking. The country has become a legendary manifestation of the inglorious paradox of living in plenty but wallowing in lack; how else does one explain the country being the largest oil producer in Africa and the eleventh largest in the world, and also the sixth poorest country in the world? Successive military governments devastated the socio-economic structures of the country and made the citizens vulnerable to all manner of insecurities. According to a UNESCO report on human trafficking in Nigeria, "There is massive unemployment and a general lack of opportunities for economic ventures, low standards of living, devalued local currencies and a failure to meet the health, food, habitat and security needs of the people" (33). The document goes ahead to declare: "populations living in political and economic instability often seek to migrate elsewhere in search of better opportunities." (33)

The major motivation for Alice's entry into prostitution is her family's economic condition. We are told that her family lives in "grinding poverty" (100). Having lost all hope of economic rehabilitation from a more decent source, Alice's father, a sexual pervert of curious dimensions himself, decides that his fifteen year-old daughter's beauty is a talent that can be exploited for the family good. This appears the only way he could see Alice through school, since he otherwise struggles

immensely to buy the books required for class reading. He thus orchestrates Alice's induction into prostitution by encouraging her to respond positively to passes made at her by male admirers. He would, with time, readily endorse her trip abroad as a sex slave. Our UNESCO report corroborates the realism of Alice's father's contribution to his daughter initiation into the flesh trade. "The economic situation is such that most parents are unable to care and properly feed their families. Parents subject their children to various forms of labour, including trafficking, for economic gains" (33).

Elsewhere in the novel, general references are made to the connection between the sex trade and the parlous economic situation of Nigeria which serves as a veritable catalyst for peace-time mass migration. At the height of his pursuit of the trafficking ring, Abel's response to the dangerous complexity of the geography of the human trade is thought-provoking: "If Africa had more responsible leadership; if people had been less greedy…" (205). A Liberian trafficking agent he meets on another leg of the hunt in Bomako, Mali, further drives home the point for Abel: "Nigeria helped us during our civil war. Odd how most of the migrants here are from Nigeria. And over sixty percent of the prostitutes in Italy are Nigerians. Your country must really find out the underlying causes of this migration and do something." (209)

Although he does not wander directly into this argument, that he sees the sex trade as another form of slavery provokes a further implication that even though Nigeria seems to have taken it too far, the nation has necessarily exhibited the postcolonial vulnerability of former colonies. For one, the seed of materialist vampiredom that characterised previous transatlantic contacts is one notable legacy indigenous African leadership took away from the West. The socio-economic and political failure of post-colonial Africa, Nigeria inclusive, as the likes of Walter Rodney would argue, is an outcome of the master-servant relationships of yore. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, describing what he calls "The transition of imperialism from the colonial to the neo-colonial stage," refers to independent Africa as "a new company, a company of African profiteers firmly deriving their character, power and inspiration from their guardianship of imperialist interests." (160)

However, one picture that Ojediran paints clearly and elaborately is the connection between the international sex trade and globalization.

He, of course, through the vast connectivities Peter Abel's multi-transatlantic investigative adventures throw up, acknowledges the role of the global agenda in the emergence and establishment of such negative, alternative economies as sex trafficking. As in everything else, globalization's powers to "localize the international and internationalize the local" have meant the explosion of sex into a major international commodity. According to the UNESCO report on Human Trafficking in Nigeria; "Trafficking in human beings, especially women and girls, is not new. Historically it has taken many forms, but in the context of globalization, has acquired shocking new dimensions." (11).

Globalization "shrinks" impossibilities of time and space in world relationships. It is in the context of the global world, as Abel would discover, that the overwhelming international collaboration in the sex trafficking is accounted for, even though the commodity of interest is largely African. Abel's preliminary investigations in Nigeria reveal that he was "dealing with a powerful international syndicate… with ties to foreign embassies…" (52). The long chain of participants in this network is constituted by people of various nations across continents. Even powerful international politicians are among the vast transnational, transatlantic clientele. Alice's last patron in the business is a United States Senator from Kentucky. Just as in every other activity of global significance, the one unifying object is commodified in terms that serve all stakeholders irrespective of nativity.

It is in this vein too that sex trafficking's formidable character as an agency of globalization has been built up. For Devin Brewer, "The condensing of the world can be attributed to the process of globalization. It is in large part due to globalization that human trafficking has become such a lucrative and thus, fast-growing criminal activity." But Brewer is quick to point out the flipside of it: "It must be acknowledged that forms of slavery and human trafficking are not just outcomes of globalization; they are part of the globalization process itself that involves a functional integration of dispersed economic activities" (46).

In the light of Brewer's thesis above, the spaces of representation of the major players in the international prostitution sector is 'global'; in other words they constitute a kind of global citizenry which plays by its own common rules of engagement, or codes of conduct. Abel hardly takes this into consideration when he meets Roy King, A.K.A. The Lion,

a kingpin in the business, at the Canary Islands hub of the trafficking trade. He approaches The Lion from an erroneous point of view; from the perspective of a 'fellow' Nigerian: "Abel was immediately struck by his accent. Another fellow Nigerian. Were they all unscrupulous thugs? He suddenly felt ashamed that *his country* was being represented by such people" (Emphasis mine, 221). Abel does not realise at this point that The Lion is a 'global' citizen as long as the sex trade is concerned, and not merely or necessarily a Nigerian. This misconception nearly costs Abel his life.

Brewer's interpretation of how the sex trade economy runs a global procedure is authentic and interesting. Citing Kevin Bales, he gives the example of "the woman recruited in Thailand, and subsequently trafficked to other states as a sex-slave who generates money that is in turn recycled into the Thailand brothel economy" (46). As clearly illustrated in Ojediran's *A Daughter For Sale*, this is very much the case in the Nigerian/African version. Alice's father's permutation about benefiting financially from the trafficking of his daughter as a sex slave turns true. Although the largesse does not last for long, proceeds from his daughter's exploits as an international prostitute begins to find its way into the Nigerian economy, through him and through the other stakeholders. One reason, therefore for which the syndicate remains indomitable and vicious is this colossal economy it has built. It is decisive in eliminating whatever or whoever it considers an obstacle to the realisation of its massive economic goals. That is why Tunde Picketts, the *Zodiac* investigative journalist; Dupe, Alice's friend and fellow prostitute; and, of course, Marcy, the Washington D.C.-based sex trader, are killed. While Picketts died for doing a story for the *Zodiac* on the trafficking ring, Dupe and Marcy are murdered in cold blood for giving Abel information.

Irrespective of the suggestions of equal opportunities and reciprocity which ordinarily characterize the global village rhetoric, there are indications that Ojediran still thinks that the odds of this transatlantic relationship are fully stacked against the African. For him, the transatlantic sex trade provides an opportunity for the perpetuation of an age old exploitation. Ojediran's contentions speak to physical, financial and psychological deprivations attendant to slavery and colonialism. Of course, that these girls are subjected to indescribable acts of bestiality and

even murdered amounts to subjugation of near-equal magnitude as the previous fates of the African. Part of what galvanizes Peter Abel's antagonistic interests in what he thinks is a 'modern-day slavery' is the story of the Nigerian woman who is murdered in Italy. Even when the killer is found, he gets away with only a light sentence, "because nobody objected when the authorities allowed him to plead guilty to some lesser charge." To Abel the impression here is that the African woman prostitute working in Europe or America is a "disposable person" (48-49). Moreover, selling sex remains tantamount to relinquishing human dignity, and if what Africa does now is to 'export' sex, just as it did physical energy to work on plantations century's back, then we have a similar kind of dehumanization in our hands. For instance, when Abel meets Alice in a London brothel/ massage parlour, just a few weeks after she is smuggled out of Nigeria by the trafficking gang, there is hardly any humanity left in her. She had become a zombie of sorts, and hardly remembers anything, not even Abel's identity.

> Abel could hardly believe that this was the same girl. Tears stung his eyes. Somehow after all the miles and all the pain, it was heart-breaking to see what had become of her. He wondered if there was anything human inside this shell left to save. What would her mother think when she saw her?
>
> Alice had grown impatient. "So, are you going to undress? Time is wasting." It was strange. When Abel had rescued her that night in Lagos, she had been so full of life, so seductive. Now she was offering a body devoid of a soul. Who would want to make love to such a creature? Did the men who came here really not notice? Didn't they care? (209-270)

Although Alice had also been a prostitute in Nigeria, where, as Abel recollects, "she had been so full of life, so seductive," the transatlantic transition from Lagos to London proves so devastating. There was exploitation in Lagos, no doubt, for prostitution is all about the sapping of physical and spiritual energies. But this is nothing compared to the international sex market where the stakes are definitely higher, and where the pangs of translocation and dislocation are greater. And for a young

girl of fifteen like Alice who finds herself in a very dangerous profession many miles away from home, physical and psychological severance is not the only kind of dislocation open to her victim; there is even more crucially, *maturative* dislocation, where the development of the girl into a reasonable adult, capable of contributing her quota to national, continental and global development, is ruptured forever.

In a narrative of the nature of Ojediran's, it will be difficult to miss out a reference to the culture of dependence established for Africa by its powerful transatlantic counterparts. The suggestion that there is no end yet in sight to Africa's leaning on the West and the Americas in socio-economic and political terms reiterates the reality that in spite of the end to slavery and the attainment of political independence, Africa continues to depend for its sustenance on its 'masters.' For instance, while expressing the illogicality of the application of the term 'postcolonial' to Africa, Tejumola Olaniyan highlights "The continent's world-historical debt peonage to its former colonizers, its chokehold by foreign-owned multinational corporations, and its invasion by ever more irresistible weapons of Euro-American cultural imperialism." ("Postmodernism" 637). Biodun Jeyifo, while describing the same phenomenon, talks about a distinction between "The colonization of the body, of physical energies and capacities" and "The colonization of the psyche in newer forms of late capitalist merchandizing and advertising of products whereby what appears to be our deepest needs, our deepest desires are not really ours anymore, but obey the logic of the penetration of market forces into virtually every sphere of life" ("In the Wake" 613). Reduced to the continental socio-economics of the control of the mechanisms of production, the Euro-American tendency still looms large over the African's hopes of survival. This is the major reason for the rampant, golden-fleece motivated migrations. The African labourer (sex labourers inclusive) yearns for the European work environment, and dreams of the substantial prosperity associated with it, because the myth of the Euro-American paradise still exercises a stranglehold on the African (survival) consciousness. It is the same reason why African women, even those originally not in the trade in their African bases, could opt, or be lured into international prostitution. Alice's father in *A Daughter for Sale* exemplifies this mentality. Having failed to score any worthwhile points of financial stability for himself, his hopes now lie in

what Europe and America have to offer to Alice as a sex slave. The patronage of this myth of dependence propels him to initiate and execute his daughter's trafficking across the Atlantic. While arguing for his proposal with his wife, he asks her: "Don't you want your daughter to make money like other girls who are acquiring property all over the place?... You are crying now, but just wait until our daughter begins to send us money." (141-142)

Ojediran's novel does not just raise very important critical questions about contemporary transatlantic transactions and interactions involving the African, it also answers them with admirable aplomb. A narrative of many recommendations, *A Daughter for Sale* speaks without compromise and ambivalence about the causes, character and context of sex trafficking. It is somewhat incredible that a novel constructed in the near romance/thriller mode can summon such forceful moral effrontery, and conjure such vividness of life. *A Daughter for Sale* projects the almost super-human qualities of Peter Abel, the investigative journalist, not just to fascinate the audience's sense of adventure, but to convince it to take one hard long look at an already bad situation with every propensity to get worse. According to Eustace Palmer, "the Romance… concentrates on the individual, tending towards the idealization or glorification of the hero." For Palmer also, the Romance writer takes a daydream away from reality and indulges in phantasy, and his hero usually lives in a world of dreams and illusions" (*Studies* 2). At face value, therefore, these profiles fundamentally fit what Ojediran does with Peter Abel. But on deeper critical appreciation, it becomes clear that the romance element provides the audacious, authoritative omniscient posture to tackle a transatlantic emergency of the calibre of sex slavery. When most other novels on the subject merely tend to draw attention to a modern day evil, and leave us only empathizing with the victims, and the hopelessness of our world, Ojediran mobilizes us to action. Peter Abel's super-heroic capabilities project us right into the heart of the trade, where he does what is rarely done—retrieve a trafficked girl from the jaws and the claws of a dare-devil syndicate. If Peter Abel needs largely unbelievable endowments to conquer his fictional universe, Ojediran seems to be contending, the real life battle against sex slavery can still be won through greater commitment to national and continental economic repositioning, more intensive orientation, more strategic intelligence, greater cooperation

between transnational and transatlantic stakeholders, better quality leadership, etc.

As a thriller, *A Daughter for Sale* is most effective. It possesses enough technical solidity to provide a rich dose of literary entertainment—thanks mainly to its pacy, action-packed plot and the unmistakable thriller elements of surprise and suspense. These, alongside its quality of realism, or the inspired manipulation of what Palmer refers to as "moral or social design," makes it one truly transatlantic, truly global, truly 21st century African novel.

Notes

1. Allwell Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu's consistent manner of describing the treatment of globalization in recent African literature. See for instance, their co-authored *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Aesthetics of Commitment Narrative* (Ibadan: Kraft, 2010), pg 235.

2. Begun by the Portuguese in 1526; ended three centuries later in early 19th century.

3. Also known as the 'Triangular Trade,' owing to the routine geographical pattern it took. Slave ships would arrive West Africa from British Ports like London, Liverpool and Bristol with made in Britain goods like cloth, guns, ironware and alcohol. These goods would be used to trade for men and women and children, captured by African slave traders or bought from African Chiefs. These Africans would then be transported on these ships to the West Indies where they would be bought by plantation owners as farm hands. (Source: The Abolition Project Website).

4. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes in *The Classic Slave Narratives,* hundreds of ex-slaves have produced slave narratives, principally with the aim of indicting "both those who enslaved them and the metaphysical system drawn upon to justify their enslavement" (ix). Many of these narrators ended up as 'Afro-Americans,' while some like Equiano maintained his African identity.

5. See Rodney's classic, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (first published in 1972).

6. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Website.

7. See "The New Nigerian Novel and the Dislocated Femininity: Narrativising Sex Trafficking," paper presented at the 41st edition of the African Literature Association Conference in Bayreuth Germany which held between 3rd and 6th July 2015.

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