

## Migration, Human Trafficking and the Literary Praxis in Ifowodo's *The Grip of the Cartel* and *Farewell to Eldorado*

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### Abstract

The dawn of the new millennium ushered in new forms of writings that are at variance with those of the preceding epoch both in thematic preoccupation and creative aesthetics. Unlike the works of their predecessors who explored national tragedies: military dictatorship, corruption, and political and economic rupture, in the Nigerian social space, Ifowodo and his contemporaries grapple with the vagaries of migration and human trafficking. This paper examines Ifowodo's works, *A Grip of the Cartel* (a play) and *Farewell to Eldorado* (a novel), in the light of the above rubric. In these works, Ifowodo explores social dislocations as the primary cause of emigration and human trafficking and the consequent tragedy it imposes on the Nigerian socio-political environment. The paper concludes that Ifowodo's works are a prism through which the burgeoning maladies of migration and human trafficking are evaluated.

**Keywords:** Migration, Human Trafficking, globalisation, literary Praxis

### Introduction

A significant feature of literature rests in its artistic weaving of events that touch on the moral conscience of society. It draws on political, religious, and traditional codes as variegated tropes for assessing social justice while crediting society's various existential contradictions. The rate at which Nigerians celebrate wealth and quick riches has not only created a moral burden on the society but has enhanced the spate of ritual killings, human trafficking, kidnappings, armed robberies, embezzlement of public funds, corruption, advanced free fraud, among others (Awhefeada, 2013). The propensity of this unending social malaise in the Nigerian social space has been thematised by many Nigerian writers whose works bear remarkable testimony to the nation's experience (Emama, 2024). As Okonjo-Ogunyemi points out, the "most important distinction of this generation of writers is the shift from the colonial to the contemporary world, the rural to the urban, and the illiterate to the educated, as they inscribe their selves in their texts" (288).

Thus, the urge to invent and create a world devoid of all manifestations of human decadence has, in recent years, become a leitmotif of many of these writings. Like the 18<sup>th</sup>-century English society bedevilled by the industrial revolution, which crumbled the very foundation of her morality, the Nigerian society has become hostile to writers who, like the prophets of old, abhor injustice and the brazen political recklessness that is now an index of much of contemporary Nigeria. This explains the truism that "the literature of every epoch bears testimonies to the appurtenances of the period. The writer, being a member of the human society, often sources materials for his creative enterprise from the pool of events – whether major or minor as it might be – to advance his sensibilities about such periods, especially as they concern man in a society that is always fraught with various challenges" (Omoko 2022, 236). Ifowodo's *A Grip of the Cartel* and *Farewell to Eldorado*, Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and *On Black Sister's Street*, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Razinat

Mohammed's *Habiba* and Abidemi Sanusi *Eyo* which are representative works of this new trend of writings, foreground radical departures from the artistic crucibles of the shared literary patrimony already established by their predecessors because the writers examine, in their works, the oddities of migration and human trafficking which are enhanced by globalisation.

### **Globalisation and the Indices of Migration and Human Trafficking**

The positive influence of globalisation is indisputable. Its influence on global communication, cross-cultural hybridity, and positive mercantile underpinnings are a few examples (Emama, 2024; Awhefeada, 2006; Emama, 2022; Awhefeada, 2016). However, it has also enhanced and sustained the burgeoning business of human migration and trafficking in human beings. Many Third-World countries, especially Nigeria, have failed to establish strong institutions and create an environment for citizens to live decent lives; many of the able-bodied youths look to Europe and the Americas for survival. Many of the youths migrate abroad to escape poverty and hardship foisted on them by society and to negotiate their existence through any means necessary, including sex trade and forced labour. This is why Ezechi Onyerionwu believes that "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" (45).

This phenomenon is aided by globalisation, where seemingly distant lands become nearer through ease of transportation. However, the ease of movement from one country to another foisted by globalisation makes young, innocent boys and girls ready sex tools for all manner of syndicates/groups in the transnational sex trade business. To this end, many young Africans emigrate to Western Europe and the Americas as sex workers in order to improve their social status and that of their dependents. UNESCO acknowledges this fact when it states that "trafficking in human beings, especially women and girls, is not new. Historically, it has taken many forms, but in the context of globalisation, it has acquired shocking new dimensions" (11).

Thus, by migration, we mean the movement of people from socio-economically disadvantaged countries searching for better living conditions to another settlement with a reasonably stable economy. Enajite Ojaruega expresses this point by saying, "People from developing countries tend to relocate to developed countries in search of better living conditions, which they feel are lacking in their native places". She says, "The better job market in the developed countries attracts residents of poor economies" (17). Human trafficking, on the other hand, has variously been seen as the illegal trade of people for forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. It is the trade in people, especially women and children.

Bad leadership in many African countries has found manifestations in stark disillusionment and hopelessness of her citizens – this bears testimonies to the myriads of social vices being perpetrated across the continent. The high rates of ritual killings, kidnappings, prostitution, slavery, forced labour, human trafficking, and migration, are only but a few instances of the resultant leadership failure in Africa. It is against this backdrop that Monica Udoette and Joy Nwiyi explain that:

Understanding the relationship between globalisation and the burgeoning transnational sex trade is not sufficient. It is imperative to consider closely the dysfunctional State of African societies that motivates the exit from Africa in search of "greener" but dangerous pastures: the expectation from home-based dependants and the recognition accorded immigrant returnees who have "made it" somehow in Europe (243).

Laura Reineres expresses similar sentiments and squarely domiciled the blame of women from Third-World countries, especially Africans who engage in transnational sex trade, on the failure of governments that abandoned the welfare of their citizens for projects that have no direct bearing on them. According to her,

An overwhelming number of Third-World women trafficked for sexual purposes, whose abject existence benefits ideological and repressive state apparatuses (in the form of national governments, financial enterprises, and military establishments) but whose rights and presence, paradoxically have often been erased from such state-sanctioned institutions' consciousness [...] instigate a critique of the socio-economic circumstances that lead the women to be trafficked in the first place (3).

Many of the literature that explores the thematics of human translocation and transnational sex trade find a resounding voice in Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Sefi Attah's *Everything Good Will Come*, as well as F.F. Ifowodo's *The Grip of the Cartel* and *Farewell to Eldorado*. This essay uses F.F. Ifowodo's *The Grip of the Cartel* and *Farewell to Eldorado* in its analysis because they best exemplify the literary Praxis of migration and human trafficking, which this study sets out to examine. Ifowodo works not only foreground the insidious parameters on which the subaltern female sex traders and other trafficked individuals navigate their existence but also reconstruct the subjectivity of personal identity and freedom.

### **The Literary Praxis of Migration and Human Trafficking in *The Grip of the Cartel* and *Farewell to Eldorado***

In many African war ravaged countries, the people are displaced, dispossessed and are meant to live as refugees in their land. Thus, many see migration to other countries as the only way out of their existential predicaments. In Nigeria, for instance, local realities such as unemployment, sociopolitical upheavals and insecurity have made many citizens emigrate to Europe and other foreign countries in search of better living conditions. Many, however, are trafficked against their wish, while others are trafficked because of their desperation to live a decent life. Against this backdrop, Ojaide explains that "while migration to the developed West is a relief from the economic discomfort of Africa, it burdens the individual with psychological, spiritual, and other problems" (37). The preceding attests to the thematic orientations of Ifowodo's play, *The Grip of the Cartel*, and the novel, *Farewell to Eldorado*, under review. In these works, we face the harsh reality of poverty, unemployment, and

failed socio-political and economic dislocation in Nigerian society. Consequently, the condition of the central characters in the two works under investigation is best exemplified by the above point raised by Ojaide.

For instance, the play *The Grip of the Cartel* derives its aesthetic moorings from the 'get rich quick or die trying' syndrome that currently haunts the Nigerian moral fabric. The play presents the conflict between living by religious and spiritual beliefs and living by a Nigerian existential philosophy; to use the words of Franco, one of the trafficked characters in the play: "Does it matter how he got the wealth that changed his life? All we want to hear is that he made changes in his life. I call such guys smart guys. If he was engaged in some dubious game, it did not matter as long as he was not caught" (12). The kind of orientation conveyed in the extract above sums up the Nigerian predicament, that it is up to the individual to get rich through any means possible, whether legal or illegal, provided he/she discovers the meaning of life through personal experiences in the earthly world. However, in this case, the playwright unfurls the pains, embarrassment and evils that constitute the global trade in humans.

Moreover, Ifowodo explores the metaphor of survival and the socio-economic risks associated with it. He understands the social context in which the people of the Third-World countries, especially Africans, placed their existence. Over the years, their countries have been governed by visionless and uninspiring leaders. In this context, the quest for survival becomes an obsession for those who aspire to live above the debased State of affairs that society offers. Thus, at the play's beginning, we are confronted by the hopelessness that constitutes the existential fulcrum of young Nigerian graduates who could not find a job in a society where only the rich are respected. They are torn between remaining in Nigeria to wait for providence or travelling abroad to seek greener pastures. Franco and Johnny express the disillusionment of many Nigerian youths who have been betrayed and abandoned by the State:

**Franco:** My God! I am fed up with this Kingdom. I will do anything to get

out and stay out. I just don't understand why nothing works here. I am tired. I want to leave. My guys, the last ceremony that I attended will hasten me to leave this Kingdom. The high calibre men were showering bundles of money on everyone that was praise-singing, whereas I had nothing.

**Johnny:** Just like you, I am also through with this Kingdom. I will just go

there and do anything that I could lay my hands on. Can (*points at the girls in bikini.*) you see those girls over there? Can you afford any one of them, high class babes with fine skin? I must go and come back to pick such angels. (p.8)

However, their friend, Oyibo, thinks otherwise. He believes that they are being unpatriotic in planning to abandon their country and travel to Europe and America, where their knowledge and expertise would be used to develop and improve the human capital of such countries. He even fears that, in their urge to travel abroad, they might fall into the wrong hands; the hands of human traffickers who would exploit them and enslave them. He expresses his fears to his friends thus:

**Oyibo:** If you fall into the hands of human traffickers, you are finished.

They will just sell you as a slave to the highest bidder in neighbouring countries. You won't even get to Europe. Oh, Ojo I can imagine how you are going to die swimming across the Mediterranean Sea that seems endless (p.11).

Nonetheless, when they encounter Odogwu, the leader of the Global Human Trafficking Cartel in Nigeria, Oyibo, who had been sceptical about the entire idea of travelling abroad, becomes the first to jump at the offer, to the surprise of his friends. In the end, the friends are trafficked, dehumanised, exploited and abandoned. They attest to their harrowing experiences thus:

**Oyibo:** Thank God, I am back to this Kingdom. Oh, I never knew that I will

still meet this Kingdom and savour the freshness of the land. Oh sweet home. I never liked the idea of travelling out. I was ready to sacrifice and contribute to the development of this Kingdom. Then that Odogwu, the Big Boss came and he convinced me against my earlier position of not travelling out of the Kingdom. Franco, look at what they did to me.

**Franco:** (*Winces as he gets up from his seat.*) You are talking about your

case. What about mine? I raised ₦1m but when the Big Boss said he will finance the journey, I kept the money, having changed it into dollars. Behold when I got there, I was sold along with my money and I became the property of my slave master. He dispossessed me of the money and made a slave out of me. I used to work from morning to night, and when I complained, they sent me to the human traffickers who beat the daylight out of me. The last beating had almost dislocated my waist hence I am walking in this crooked manner. I, Franco, was deceived and sold into slavery, unbelievable, unfathomable.

...

**Johnny:** ...Unknown to us, they were engaged in slave trading in this

modern time. Remember I went there with my fiancée. She insisted on going with me. She said I would forget about her when I got to Europe. So she followed me, she left behind her shop, her tailoring shop with about fifteen girls as apprentices...

...Oh, to end the story, she died. The human traffickers on the transit route raped her to death. ...I was forced to witness the raping of my fiancée. The manner of her death was chilling... (p.115, 116, 117).

The excruciating experiences of the trafficked characters are artistic motifs aimed at mocking the consciences of those in positions of authority that they should create an enabling environment for the youth in the country to thrive and also to warn the

youths who are restless and desirous of travelling abroad for greener pastures to have a rethink before they fall into problems they would regret.

The fate of these trafficked young boys and girls is trapped by the malfeasance of those who offered to give them help. They are manipulated to believe that they will die or something sinister will happen to their parents back home should they disobey their master/sponsors. Thus, Odogwu and his powerful cartel make the unsuspecting victims go through different rituals and oath-taking ceremonies. Their blood, pubic hairs, and fingernails are taken for a spiritual oath to keep them in check and to ensure total obeisance. This is recreated in the conversation between Odogwu and the trafficked victims in the excerpt below:

**Odogwu:** Excellent, you will go for a test as the final hurdle before you can

be accepted in that country.

**Esohe:** What other kind of test?

**Odogwu:** With a syringe, they will take your blood, and then shave your

pubic hair, cut your finger nails

**Eloho:** What for, Big Boss, why? (As the girls exchange glances.)

**Odogwu:** Oh yeah, to test for HIV and other diseases. The foreign country

wouldn't want diseases to spread in that country.

**Ejiro:** Big Boss, but why pubic hair and finger nails?

**Odogwu:** With all that, they can get a comprehensive medical report of

your life (p.21).

Odogwu employs various dubious means to recover his money from his victims. Sometimes, he would beat up the parents of his trafficked victims who refused to comply with his excessive demands for payback. In other cases, he would take the daughter or wife of his debtors as collateral for his money. His greed for wealth is unlimited – the government is helpless as many of the police officers are on his payroll. He has all the heads of the various anti-graft agencies in the country in his pocket. Thus, his human trafficking empire becomes so large and seems unstoppable. Thus confirming Onyerionwu's statement that the "level of organisation of the operational networks of the burgeoning trade suggests that it had built a gigantic economy for itself, any threat to which would be met with stiff, decisive, and even deadly resistance" (47).

Nonetheless, it took the effort of the traditional ruler of the Kingdom to keep this illegal business in check by making a proclamation that banned human trafficking in the Kingdom. Here, the playwright introduces a profound thesis that should be taken seriously. The government and its political players failed to uphold the tenets of genuine and purposeful governance that they swore to provide for the people. To the playwright, Nigeria and, indeed, Africa should return to the traditional African ways of oath-taking in which the powers of the gods and ancestors are invoked as witnesses. Ohafia asks Femi, one of the business associates of Chief Odogwu:

**Ohafia:** Can you fight the gods? Can you with blemished hands, and with

your guilty conscience? Now it is left to you to take the news round that the curse and the power of the gods are at work. No lesson is as powerful as this (p.92).

This was the strategy adopted by the Benin Monarch, Oba Ewuare II, against perpetrators of human trafficking in Edo State as well as native doctors who administered an oath of secrecy on victims on March 10, 2018. The action of the monarch yielded great results as many victims were liberated. Thus, in the play, Odogwu and his cartel were dislodged the moment the gods were involved. The gods killed Odogwu, who refused to heed the warnings of the gods.

It must be stated, however, that many of the victims of human trafficking are aware that they are being trafficked into prostitution abroad. However, they prefer any conditions outside the ones in their home country. In other words, the human trafficking business thrives because there is an army of "restive and disillusioned populace who get suffocated by a failed economic order" in their countries (Awhefeada 2012:63). This is expressed in the conversation between Ohafia and some of the girls that the king's pronouncement prevented from being trafficked.

**Ohafia:** That is the plain truth. Tell me, what do they need your pubic hair

for, or your fingernails or your undies? HIV tests do not require such items....

**4<sup>th</sup> Singer:** Whether they are selling human being or not, I will leave this

Kingdom. Can you imagine the exchange rate? What the hell is happening? I want to go and experience a good life over there.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Singer:** Can you imagine that all my neighbours who have graduated

for many years do not have a job? There are no places to work, and yet you want them to remain here, to do what?

**Ohafia:** That is not the answer to your question. You don't sell yourselves

into slavery, because of lack of jobs in your Kingdom. Of what profit is it to you to end up dead in a foreign land?

...

**2<sup>nd</sup> Singer:** What sort of pronouncement is this? To prevent people from

travelling out of the Kingdom? Right from the days of Abraham, there has been migration. People moved from one area to another for better lives. If one is not satisfying your aspiration, you can check out. I don't support this kind of declaration (p. 88-89).

Many of them, especially the able-bodied youths and professionals, now seek solace in Western countries to achieve their potential Ifowodo's novel, *Farewell to Eldorado*, draws its artistic moorings from the above rubrics. The novel, which revolves around the crises of refugees and the quest by world leaders to address the same, opens a significant aspect of man that tends to tell us that the hope of peaceful coexistence among human beings is only in the realm of wishful dreams. This is because, in any

human society, there is always the conglomeration of the good, the bad and the ugly. Society, no matter what, is always fraught with depraved, corrupt, and power-lust individuals who will go to any length to achieve their selfish aims.

Like *The Grip of the Cartel* which is deployed to examine the evils of human trafficking, Ifowodo's *Farewell to Eldorado* adumbrates the evils of human trafficking and forced migration. The work confronts the dreary human conditions imposed on the poor and vulnerable in society who migrate to foreign countries with failed political systems. In this novel, Ifowodo examines the challenges of resettling refugees who troop to Europe from different countries ravaged by war and political instability. However, the refugees would be settled in a new country known as Eldorado. The author tells us at the beginning of the novel that this new country, known as Eldorado, is,

An island between Africa and Europe, as a settlement for refugees who fled from their countries for one reason or another. Some left their countries because of economic hardship, some because of political victimisation and others left their war-torn countries for peaceful existence elsewhere"(11).

In the novel, the UN had organised other wealthy countries to create a new settlement on an island where these refugees, running from various injustices in their home countries, could start a new life. Many of the migrants and refugees that are being resettled on this new Island are from Africa. These are disillusioned people running away from bad government in their home countries. Josephat Kubayanda presents a horrific situation in many post-independent African nations and confirms that "Post-colonial dictatorship in Africa concerns itself with repression, which, in effect, means the arrest, exile, execution or consistent harassment of dissident voices. The general result of dictatorship is an atmosphere of fear, hate and humiliation" (5). In the novel, for instance, those who could not stand the dictatorial tendencies their leaders' migrate to the new land where they are confronted with similar alienation. This new settlement is expected to be a model with adequate social amenities that a good society should provide for its citizens, but the reverse becomes the case. All the essential human amenities such as housing, good water supply, electricity, and good roads are available in Eldorado. There is free food and an accessible transportation system in this new country – a fantastic world found only in the imagined world of Disney! This is the social backdrop and ideal on which the thematics of *Farewell to Eldorado* is built.

The author reveals in the novel that from among the refugees, Casca Games, a political refugee, is selected as a representative of the UN envoy to oversee the activities of this dream world pending when an election would be conducted under his supervision to usher in a formal government that would control the affairs of Eldorado. His choice, however, does not augur well with other characters in the novel, especially the duo of Don Mascara, an ex-warlord who is interested in Casca Games' fiancée, Marie Barbers and Madam Susan, a human trafficker who has lost one of her precious girls, the same Marie Barbers, to Casca Games. Madam Susan is a highly connected and ruthless human trafficker. She lures innocent girls from her country into prostitution with the promise of giving them jobs in Europe. The author tells us that Madam Susan was the girls' "mentor, their manager and their professional guide.



The girls did the business of sleeping with men, and Madam Susan collected the money" (p.60). Through this act, she became influential. In no time, she had gone beyond an individual prostitute to an international provider of sex pleasure to lose men in foreign countries.

She began to run brothels and she became connected to the worldwide human trafficking business. She was seen cruising in exotic cars, and her children were admitted into private universities, where fees were astronomical. She began to make money from her brothels, from human trafficking and from preparing fake travelling documents—her feelings of compassion for fellow human beings dried up" (p.65).

Conflict arises when Don Mascara joins Madam Susan to contest the new State's governorship and deputy positions. The duo having lost their influential status the moment they entered Eldorado, sought various devious means to grab power. Don Masacara, a rebel leader, had plunged his former country into a senseless war. The author reveals that:

Prior to his onslaught, his country was peaceful. Unemployment was moderate, not high, essential commodities were available and there was considerable housing for all. However, Don Mascara was perturbed about one family's eternal hold on the country. With the emergence of Don, the once peaceful country was no longer the same. What he could have achieved constitutionally, he attempted through violence, and the death of citizens that followed was unprecedented (20).

This revelation about Don Mascara draws the reader into his psycho-social State. For Madam Susan, the atmosphere in Eldorado does not support her kind of lifestyle and business. Besides, having reached Eldorado, all her girls take advantage of the freedom it offers and desert her. She becomes helpless. Thus, the thought of becoming Don Mascara's deputy governor in this new settlement is a good bargain that will enable her to regain her status. At least her influence can be restored. The author informs us, "With the thought of Don Mascara, her mind became calm. She would reach out to the world human trafficking moguls"(p.62).

In their bid to grab power by all means necessary, Don and Susan resort to blackmail and threats. The police chief of Eldorado is their willing tool. Other contestant in the election are threatened to drop their ambition. The few who could not be cowed embarked on a protest to the headquarters of the UN building, where the body in charge of the elections on the Island resides. Don is disqualified from taking part in the election and he is enraged by this development. He reaches out to his rebel associates outside the Island to supply him with men and ammunition to burn down the new State if he cannot grab power by force.

Casca Games, on the other hand, is threatened when Don and his men invade his well-fortified residence in a bid to kidnap his fiancée, Marie Barber. Casca Games feels that the only way to stop Don and Susan from destroying the new State is to disqualify them from contesting the elections. However, the UN chiefs believe otherwise. According to them, Eldorado is an experiment that gives people a new environment in which to change from the former ways. The UN Secretary tells Casca Games:

That is the experiment. Given a different environment with all the comfort, would they still behave the way they did in

their home countries? If they turn out bad, they are rotten eggs, so they should be thrown out" (100).

This idea did not go down well with Casca Games, who believes that people with depraved personalities like Don and Susan should not be allowed to get closer to holding political power. He knows that the UN had planned to create a utopian society but fails to understand the point made by Thomas More, the British humanist of Renaissance England, that in any utopian society, it would be practically challenging to save those who "have thoroughly decreed and determined with themselves to roam headlong the contrary way..." (557). Therefore, Casca Games loses interest in the entire idea of Eldorado the moment it is resolved that Don should be allowed to contest the elections. The author tells us that,

To Casca Games, what they were experimenting with was deadly. He disagreed that it was nearly impossible to exclude people like Don Mascara from a community. They argued that people like Don Mascara should be managed adequately because such persons would always be in any community (193).

However, Don is allowed to contest the election but he loses despite his resort to violence and rigging. Don and his men kept to their promise of destroying Eldorado in the instance that he lost. The accompanying post-elections razzmatazz only justifies the novel's title, "Farewell to Eldorado".

What Ifowodo has done in this novel is to adumbrate that in politics, individuals with questionable credentials should not only be banned from intermingling in state affairs but outrightly be stopped from participating in the process of nation-building. Besides, the freedom that the migrants and trafficked victims enjoy in Eldorado only foregrounds the fact that people can have better lives if societies do away with bad leaders. The author, therefore, uses the characters of Don Mascara and Madam Susan to reflect and refract the two fundamental social and political divides that constitute the oddities of many war-ravaged societies – warmongers and selfish profiteers.

### Conclusion

Victims of human trafficking are helpless because their respective countries have failed them. The treatment of the themes of migration and human trafficking in the two works only explains the author's passionate stance against the injustices and psychological trauma the victims go through as well as its attendant moral burden on society. He deploys the works not only as satirical depictions of the lack of will by world leaders to purge themselves of selfish individuals like Don and Susan and the Odogwus of the society but also to propose a salient treaty that codifies the ingredients that make for a peaceful human society. What is inherent in the two works is that until the rotten eggs are removed from the socio-political landscape, society will continue to be plagued by the depravities of its creations. Ifowodo, therefore, envisions a new world order, where human beings can live and be satisfied only if each individual abides by the rules of engagement.

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