

Combating Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration with Literature

Chukwuma Anyanwu, Ph.D. (+234 (0) 803-5803-550)
(anyanwuekesyn56@gmail.com; anyanwubc@delsu.edu.ng)
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9617-2573>
Web of Science Research ID: [GVU-1767-2022](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/chukwuma_Anyanwu)
(https://www.researchgate.net/profile/chukwuma_Anyanwu)

Department of Theatre Arts
Faculty of Arts
Delta State University, Abraka

&

Toju Egbi (+234 8128828853/+234 8057791646)
(hrmqueentojuegbi@gmail.com)

Department of Mass Communication
Edwin Clark University
Kiagbodo, Burutu L. G. A.
Delta State

Abstract

Literature is a unique tool in the hands of story tellers in the various literary genres, including audio-visual and social media to be deployed in addressing social issues. It answers to the occasion to which the artist in the various forms employ it thus it can be used to interrogate any subject that is of concern to humanity. One such subject is that of human trafficking, a social problem which has plagued our society in recent times. The paper draws from some Nigerian literary texts to address this endemic problem. It concludes that human trafficking can be addressed with the use of literature provided the leadership is willing and ready to address such. It was equally recommended that literature would be ineffective if those concerned are not disposed to read, go to the theatre to watch stage productions or make themselves available to watch movies since these are where literary works can be sourced.

Keywords: Human trafficking, Literature, Nigeria, Leadership, Social problem.

Introduction

The issue of trafficking in human beings, also called human trafficking is one that dates back to several centuries and whose permanent solution may never be found. That sounds like a Jeremiad! But it is the truth nevertheless. The reason is simply that trafficking in human beings has always been with us dating back to the Book of *Genesis* in the Bible when Joseph's brothers sold him for reasons best known to them (*Genesis*). Indeed, human trafficking or modern day slavery is as old as its twin epidemic, prostitution. Both are products of man's quest for survival on the one hand, and the desire for control, domination and that unconscious but atavistic urge to experiment, on the other. However, it is looked at, it reduces human beings physically, psychologically,

intellectually and spiritually. It questions our claim to intellectual superiority over other creatures because no other living creature turns its fellows into a profit making venture and takes pleasure in so doing than man. This, perhaps, accounts for why it is regarded as a crime against humanity. It is a criminal offence which ranks very high in the hierarchy of crimes against humanity. This is why efforts are being made by the United Nations, responsible governments, non-governmental organizations and well meaning individuals in the society such as can be found in *The Grip of the Cartel*, a novel whose author is preoccupied with fighting the menace and curbing it to the barest minimum, if it cannot be completely eradicated. Indeed, several authors, (Anyanwu, 2021, Ifowodo, 2019) through their writings have shown that the menace of trafficking in human beings can be addressed through literature.

In chapter IV of the *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, sub-headed “Fundamental Rights”, sub section 34(1), it reads: “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly-

- (a) No person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment;
- (b) No person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and
- (c) No person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour (34).

Going by the Nigerian constitution as stipulated in the section quoted above, human trafficking is a violation of not only fundamental human rights of individuals; it is also a violation of the Nigerian constitution and is therefore, punishable under the law.

Definition of concepts

The idea of trafficking denotes movement or trade of some kind but in this instance the movement/trade is illegal and unlawful. It is not the usual traffic that we are familiar with in relation to traffic light which controls vehicular and other movements within our cities or for that matter traffic jam which we are used to. It is also not about movement of persons, goods, or animals in a particular direction. Human trafficking is an illegal trade in human beings, unlike trafficking in hard drugs, money laundering, arms, etc. Citing an online source, Feyisetan (2015: 12), gives an elaborate definition of human trafficking when he says:

Human trafficking is modern day slavery and is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world. It is the recruitment, transportation, harbouring, or taking of persons by means of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception for the purpose of exploiting them. The United Nations estimates that 2.5 million people are trafficked annually. It deprives people of human rights and freedoms, it is a global health risk, and it fuels organized crime. Victims of trafficking are forced or coerced into labour or sexual exploitation. Labour trafficking ranges from domestic servitude and small- scale labour operations to large-scale operations such as farms, sweatshops, and major multinational corporations. Sex trafficking is one of the most profitable forms of trafficking and involves any form of sexual exploitation in prostitution, pornography, bride trafficking, and the commercial sexual abuse of children.

The above quotation, is no doubt, more than a definition as it goes ahead to give details of types, its scale, those involved as well as the estimated population of victims globally. However, one is a bit uncomfortable with the reference to the menace as an industry. Industry denotes an economic or commercial activity but on the positive side. Using it to qualify an inhuman activity such as human trafficking confers on the crime some measure of justification. But nothing on earth can humanly justify trafficking in human beings because it embodies in itself all other crimes, known or unknown. To substantiate the above position, we shall again look at the author already quoted when he quotes The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings as saying that:

Trafficking in human beings is defined in Article 4(a) as being a combination of the following three constituent elements where the person has been subject to the act of recruitment/transportation/transfer/harbouring or receipt; by means of threat or use of force or other form of coercion/of abduction/of fraud/of deception/of abuse of power/of a position of vulnerability/of giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person; for the purpose of exploitation. It should also be remembered that the Convention envisages that a person is a ‘victim’ even if the exploitation has not yet occurred (e. g because of police raid before this happens). This is because, under the definition of trafficking, trafficking occurs once certain acts are carried out for the purpose of exploitation. Therefore, it is the purpose which is key, rather than

whether or not exploitation is actually present. Even if we are able to intervene and prevent exploitation from taking place in the UK, victims may have experienced serious trauma in their home country or en route to the UK and may still be in need of support (Feyisetan, 2015: 4-5).

We are told that human trafficking can be done in a number of ways. The victims can be threatened to cooperate, they can be forced or coerced; they can be lured into it via deception, they can be abducted and it can come as a result of betrayal of trust from both family and friends. Whichever way it comes, there is exchange, a payment either immediately or at a later date. Again, there are promises of better things ahead, a life far more exciting and rewarding than the one the potential victims are leaving behind. It is usually a case of seeing is believing or experience being the best teacher for the victims because they have to see to understand; they have to experience it to believe and by then, it is prayer and drawing from one's inner resources in order to get out. It is not true however, that most of the victims are taken unawares. Yes, majority are deceived and lied to about the nature of the job which they would do in their new environment. But, in some cases as in high profile prostitution, some of the victims are aware but again, they are not told the enormity of what awaits them. Details are usually scanty because the agents and their principals are usually economical with details. The reason is that if they provide their targets with graphic details, chances are that majority would rather not be part of the business and would prefer to stay back and this would not help the business.

TJ: Listen, you girls, the conditions we face are not the same! A man that's pressed does not know a spirit infested bush! I've had it to my neck since graduation... Do you expect me to miss this opportunity of a pleasurable job? Besides, nothing is real in this village anymore... (*Traffickers*, 22).

The above quotation buttresses the argument that some of the victims have some ideas about the nature of the job o which they are being trafficked. It is a matter of comparing the known with the unknown and preferring the latter. Instances abound where Nigerians who were doing well at home sell their properties to risk an uncertain future in America, Europe and Canada because they believe, sometimes, erroneously that such foreign nations have the key to their expected haven. It

is sometimes a deliberate risk after weighing the available options. It could be regarded as a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. Something must give.

Another aspect of the trafficking in humans which make it appear rather glamorous and exciting is the propaganda that goes with it. The perpetrators have this propaganda machinery through which they spread rumours of a wonderful and profitable new life to their prospective victims. Their media outlets which operate mainly through interpersonal or telephone communications are unrivalled in efficacy. With the addition of social media with their audio and visual appeals, only God knows how far they can go to entrap their victims. The prospective victims are promised jobs (domestic and factory based), money, marriages, foreign trips, pilgrimages and scholarships among other means of generating interest in them.

Literature on the other hand is the story or history of a people captured in fiction and non-fiction works of literature, including drama and poetry. As Acholonu (2002) has noted, literature is “the body of writings that deals with **creative ideas**, imagination and fantasy. It includes fiction and non-fiction, the oral and written works of a nation, ethnic or cultural community whose common denominator is their imaginativeness...” (16). Osofisan (2004/2005; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2014 and Bamidele, 2000), without directly defining literature agree that it is a tool for social control, traditional and cultural promotion and preservation, economic and political enlightenment and many more. It enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the society which serves it as a natural resource and which it in turn serves as a mirror to reflect society’s image of itself.

UTIMATE MADAM: Thank you, thank you. People nor dey value wetin dem get. It’s good to let them know. Konnected, thank you so much. (*Addressing the crowd*). Your tomorrow is in your hands. Forget the government, get connected to your future. If you want to be leaders of tomorrow, get ready. See your government, is there any person under forty years of age in it? Even the minister for youths is a septuagenarian. The government has nothing for you. This is your one in a life time opportunity to get connected to your future (*Traffickers*, 2).

From the above, one can see that literature is a veritable weapon to address societal concerns including human trafficking as it exposes the antics of the perpetrators to humanity by creating awareness. Necessarily, the artists who create literature live in the same society and are therefore,

in better positions to portray such. Bamidele has noted that as society, “new roles and new attitudes are assigned to the artist and art. Artists become more sensitive of their roles depending on the nature of society in which they operate,” (29).

Human trafficking is an unquantifiable evil that should not be allowed to continue but where does one start from with the rate of unemployment soaring and hunger and hardship everywhere? “The United Nations estimates nearly 2.5 million people from 127 different countries being trafficked around the world. People trafficking has reached epidemic proportions over the past decade, with a global annual market of about \$42.5 billion,” (Feyisetan 2015: 1). The statistics on human trafficking are daunting and amazing. The crime as already noted is practised at a global scale. The tragedy of the entire business is the calibre of people, the level of involvement and the extent to which it has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. It respects not age, gender nor position. It is, however, more prone to the less privileged, the unemployed, the homeless, the adventurous, the insecure and the greedy in the society, among others.

Human traffickers as already noted, also utilize the instrument or weapon of propaganda to execute their mission. Propaganda which ordinarily is positively deployed by governments, corporate bodies and some individuals as a specialized persuasion mechanism; has unfortunately become a negative force in the hands of negative minded individuals such as human traffickers as a weapon of achieving their wicked and dastard goals. *The Oxford Dictionary, Thesaurus, and Wordpower Guide*, defines Propaganda as “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.... promotion, advertising, publicity; agitprop, disinformation, counter-information, the big lie” (1026-1027).

Propaganda then, is the use of information deliberately to influence, persuade, encourage, coerce, misinform, deceive, promote, counter-inform and force a person or group of persons to do your will. It consists of going out of one’s way to deliberately distort information and disseminate same in order to mislead for purposes known to the propagandist. An online source also tells us that: “Propaganda is the spreading of information in support of a cause. The word propaganda is often used in a negative sense especially for politicians who make false claims to get elected or spread rumours to get their way. Any campaign that is used to persuade can be called propaganda,” (www.vocabulary.com).

As propaganda is spread through word of mouth, print, electronic and social media, even so can it be countered through the use of same means and methods. Indeed, for everything in life there is an alter ego. That being the case, as fire is used to put out fire, even so can literature be deployed to counter propaganda. Moreover, the advent of social media with their audio-visual appeal, easy accessibility and use, as well as personal and group participation give writers ready advantage to reach their audience, and in whatever language, whether they are educated or not. All these make literature available, affordable and understandable. The onus is therefore, on the writers to put it to good and positive use. Let us turn now to literature in order to know what it is.

In his inaugural lecture, Onuekwusi (2013: 6) makes us understand that literature is:

An omnibus subject from where we isolate the story. It is a term variously defined...it is “any imaginative and beautiful creation in words whether oral or written, which explores man as he struggles to survive in his existential position and which provides entertainment, information, education and excitement to its audience.”

He further says that literature is a performance in words and that literature is art and that art speaks remote truth. “Literature is a crystallization of man’s aspiration to create through words a reality, a second handle on existence not different from what the world has given but that which helps man to understand and make sense of the world.” (p.7). The challenges which man has to contend with, his longevity on earth and other constraints that militate against his comfort on earth make it necessary for man to find alternative ways of arriving at the truth. Literature gives him the nearest and best opportunity to engage his demons and find solutions to them. To further illustrate the importance of literature and the role of story in the life of man, citing Achebe’s *Anthills*, Onuekwusi says:

So why do I say that the story is chief among its fellows?

...only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort: without it, we are blind... It is the thing that makes us different from the cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbours... (vi).

From the foregoing, we can see that literature takes up the concerns of man beyond man, making it possible for generations to link up with other generations whether past, present or future. For Acholonu (2002:16), “Literature is culture in written form. It is the articulation of a people’s culture, mental and spiritual evolution. Thus, literature occupies the same role with culture in the developmental process.” Indeed, man’s life and his entire knowledge are made up of one holistic literary experience. This is because whatever man has achieved or failed to achieve, whether in science or technology, whether in mathematics or astrology, is handed down in the form of literature to the next generation. Everything is story and story is everything. The Gospel of John makes this clear in its opening Chapter:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1 vs 1-5).

A simple analysis of the above biblical quotation taken from a theological perspective makes us to understand that the WORD of God as captured above is his son, Jesus Christ, who also doubles as the bread of life. Without him, therefore, life has no meaning for man. But this knowledge came to us as *Literature!* It came in the form of a story. *Without him was nothing made that was made.* We are all aware, through this same narrative, that aside from man, God did not do any physical work of creation. The entire work of creation is a product of the spoken word, *Let there be light!* Is it any wonder therefore, that writers, creative writers, whose preoccupation is literature, are furthering the work of creation through their literary works? This is why the artist uses his/her art to combat the menace of human trafficking through literature believing that literature and literary writers are eminently qualified to tackle it and its attendant propaganda that goes with it. Writing on the responsibility the artist/filmmaker owes the audience/viewers, Omoera and Anyanwu assert, “the filmmaker owes the audience/society a level of responsibility in that the filmmaker is a representative of the viewer/society and as such, he/she should endeavour to put himself/herself occasionally in the place of the viewers in order to represent them well.” (141). Let us examine how the artist can achieve this through literature.

Curbing human trafficking and its propaganda through literature

It is instructive to note that literature can be oral or written. Indeed, it can also be audio-visual. Irrespective of the form it takes, literature is essentially and inextricably a part of a people's culture. It is through and with literature that a people through story telling educate, inform, instruct and, disseminate events and happenings in their lives. Nnolim tells us that:

Our writers have used the power of literature as a moral corrective, for literature exists in the main as a corrective to human folly, as a humanizing agent, and as the uplifter of our souls through its affective powers.... literature appeals to our sense of order, restrain(t), and discipline, imparting in its wake a sense of decorum and proportion (Nnolim 2002: 78).

The evidence from our writers and their contributions to an ordered and ethical tone of the society can be seen from the pre-colonial period to contemporary times. This runs through the gamut of literary history whether it is poetry, drama, short story or the novel, and one can go as far as including our stand up comedy and Nollywood in this job of societal cleansing through literature. The works of Amos Tutuola, who represents the initial efforts at documenting in written form our oral literature help to revive our interest in the myths and folklores which were narrated to us by our grandparents during moonlight hours. Aptly called tales by moonlight, these stories provided entertainment, information, education, instruction and generally functioned in the manner of the Television to the children of nowadays. Oral literature served as the first contact with moral instruction for children of the pre-colonial and colonial era; the pre-literate, pre-television and to some extent the modern and contemporary period.

After independence, literacy which had started flowering during the colonial period bloomed with the early attempts to publish African writers. By then the likes of Achebe, Soyinka, Ekwensi, Clark-Bekederemo, Sofola and others too numerous to mention, have begun to enrich the society with their creative and literary works. The generations of Nigerian writers have continued to blaze the trail and have gained for the country global recognition, winning the first Nobel Prize in literature for the entire Black Race in 1986 through Wole Soyinka. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has been translated in the world's major languages and in America, the young Nigerian woman from Anambra State, Chimamanda Adichie, is projecting Nigeria and Africa beyond even her own expectations.

Nigeria's *New Voices*, a term used to describe young contemporary writers where I belong and where the likes of Alex Chinwuba Asigbo, Peter Omoko, Henry Akubiro, Adediran Ademiju-Bepo, Festus Feturi Ifowodo among many others also belong, are not left out in the search for society's moral tone in the hope to get it right. Literature is presented in an engaging narrative, exciting, interactive dialogue that compels interest. In children's literature, the subject has the benefit of illustration with the use of colours that appeal to their aesthetic sense and therefore encourage interest and engender comprehension. In the folkloric mode, the stories are laced with songs and refrains that create room for retention and easy recall.

One can argue that literature is grossly undermined by illiteracy. But the beauty of the entire creative and literary engagement is its flexibility via adaptation and translation. Any story can move from one genre to another by virtue of adaptation and translation. Even when there is the problem of literacy, the indigenous language or the Nigerian Pigeon (NP) can come to the rescue. As Nwachukwu-Agbada (2014p.8), makes us understand, "literature in indigenous language is a literary afflatus that is hardly given attention. Yet this is the mainstay of our claims to having a buoyant literary tradition." The onus is therefore, on writers to deploy the benefits inherent in indigenous language in telling their stories. The indigenous language has a wider reach as there are far less literate people in the country than their illiterate counterparts who live in the vast rural areas of the country. This class of people have to be reached and carried along and this is a challenge before writers in Nigeria and elsewhere. The reason is because they are the ones more prone to be victims of human trafficking than the literate city and town dwellers. As noted earlier, literature has a wide range of communication modes to utilize in passing its message across. There is the spoken word; there is poetry, drama, prose, social media, folklore, and many others. To paraphrase this rhetorical question, is life worth living? It depends on the liver. The question can now be posed: Is literature capable of handling the challenges before it? It depends on the writer!

It is instructive to note that the first indigenous literature in Igbo language written by Pita Nwana dealt on the subject of human trafficking. Titled *Omenuko Igwuegbe*, it has been adapted to the screen in the same language and it interrogates the story of a man's travails in murky waters of life and the need to survive. When Omenuko lost his goods to the seas, he resorted to selling his apprentices into slavery in order to escape bankruptcy.

Literature has all it takes to handle human problems no matter their scope. Above all, it has provisions for all categories of human beings. For children, there is children's literature specifically written for them. As Mabel Segun, easily the major exponent of children's literature in the country has noted: "The increasing awareness of Nigerian authors of the need to write books related to the cultural background of Nigerian children seems to manifest itself mostly in folktales," (n/d, p.32). The interest in folktales perhaps, lies in the fact that there is no subject so difficult it cannot be accommodated in folktales. As already noted, there is something in literature for everyone. The only restriction is literacy and even that as mentioned earlier can be taken care of via indigenous language and Pigeon English. It is therefore, only one's personal attitude that can stand between oneself and literary works. In effect, no matter how many works are written on human trafficking and irrespective of the suggestions proffered to solve it, no progress can be made if the reader refuses to pick up the book and open it; no impact can be made when a person knows there is a play production and fails to go to the theatre; nothing can be solved when the viewer zaps from a television channel that is showing the subject of human trafficking or issues of societal concern in preference to less beneficial ones that do the opposite. Writing on Theatre and film as catalyst to leadership change in Nigeria", Anyanwu avers, a good leader should learn from the thematic preoccupations from theatre and film productions how to "come to terms with himself, come to terms with his physical environment and learn how to manage relationships with people," (40). These are what a good leader learns from literature in all its forms.

Conclusion

The major problem that literature and related academic issues face in our society is disinterest. More often than not our society has dovetailed into politics driven one where unless the subject holds meaning for politicians, it attracts no patronage. Sadly, our politicians are allergic to academic and education related concerns. We shall not be deterred however, because as the grass-cutter told its children, if they remained just one, that one must continue to cut grass. Thus, whether Nigerian writers are supported or not, they must of necessity write. This paper would not be complete without recourse to the master story teller, Albert Chinalumogu Achebe, who, while writing on the topic, "What has literature got to do with it?" And having given two beautiful anecdotes on the need for unity in the face of external aggression and the benefits of knowledge; concludes by saying:

The matter is really quite simple. Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality; enabling us to encounter in the safe manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats of integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts, a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within our problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us (Achebe, n/d : 29).

Whatever and wherever the problem/s may be, literature gives us the benefit of grappling with it, or them. Everything is a story; how we narrate it matters; how we choose to understand it counts and understanding enables us to arrive at solutions. The choice is therefore, ours. It is therefore, recommended that literature can be used to tackle any problem provided the leaders and those in positions of authority are willing not only to read but to address the issues treated in such literary works.

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