

When the Home is not Homely: Postcolonial Realities and Emergence of Human Trafficking in Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*

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Abstract

Human trafficking has been investigated in different fields of scholarship, including psychology, sociology, history and economics. However, its depiction in twenty-first-century Nigerian novels has not been given critical attention. Hence, this paper examines postcolonial indices fuelling the emergence and continuance of this challenge, as narrated in Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*, to investigate push-and-pull factors responsible for the growth of modern-day slavery. Deploying postcolonial theory, with emphasis on postcolonialist concepts like alterity, othering/ordering, unhomeliness, subalternisation and dislocation to examine power relations between human traffickers and trafficked victims in the selected narratives, it is revealed that the push-and-pull factors amplifying the proliferation of human trafficking in Okpara's *My Life has a Price* and Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* include poverty, connivance of security personnel with human traffickers, unemployment, family disintegration, leniency of the judiciary, death of the breadwinner, corruption and trafficked victims' materialistic inclinations. In *Sarah House* and *My Life Has a Price*, the factors aid the dispossession, subalternisation, *inbetweenness*, *othering/ordering* and 'exotopy' or 'outsideness' of victims. Among other narrative strategies, homodiegetic narrative focalisation and preponderant multiple settings are employed to foreground the objectivity of the narratives and the migritudinal temper and restless lifestyle of the victims.

Keywords

Human trafficking,
Twenty-first-century
Nigerian novel
My Life Has a Price,
Sarah House,
Push-and-pull factors,

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1. Introduction

In recent times, the subject of human mobility has been recurring. However, human mobility has different dimensions, one of which is human trafficking – the subject of this discourse. It cannot be denied that human trafficking thrives unabated in the contemporary world due to some human factors. This phenomenal scourge has been investigated in diverse scholarship fields, including economics, sociology, history, psychology, law and literature. Since it is a social reality, contemporary writers engage their creativity in mirroring it to conscientise their milieu of its existence, modus operandi, severity and proffering possible solutions to the challenge. It is stated that human trafficking represents a criminal act and a dramatic form of breaching fundamental human rights (Irena Korićanac, 2013, p.16). In other words, human trafficking is a form of crime which denies and ruptures inalienable human rights. Besides, this anti-human rights criminal act could be trans-border/transnational or intra-national. It is trans-border or transnational if the perpetration is carried out across the border, in which case victims are moved from one country to another country. On the other hand, intra-national human trafficking takes place within a country, and the destination is within the country (Olaniyan, 2019).

The currency of the representations of human trafficking in the 21st-century Nigerian novel requires critical investigation in literary scholarship. There are several Nigerian literary works, mostly novels, that depict the scourge of human trafficking, which have not attracted the attention of critics of Nigerian literature. This paper, therefore, examines the depiction of human trafficking, otherwise known as modern-day slavery, with particular focus on the factors responsible for its emergence and growth in the purposively selected Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*. Besides, narrative devices employed in portraying the subject matter in the two sampled Nigerian novels are investigated. A dearth of critical works on contemporary Nigerian novels that thematise human trafficking inspires this investigation. Besides, the paper is a worthy contribution to the field of migration studies, which has often viewed human mobility from a

conventional – voluntary – perspective. In the same vein, the paper establishes the *resurrection* of the supposedly abolished or perhaps *comatose* slave trade.

2. Conceptualising Human Trafficking

The globality of human trafficking is foregrounded in the comment of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2012, p.14), which states that the menace

is a global crime affecting nearly all countries in every region of the world. Between 2007 and 2010, victims of 136 different nationalities were detected in 118 countries across the world, and most countries were affected by several trafficking flows.

Thus, the challenge of human trafficking is not just for a particular region of the world, as it has become a global phenomenon. This modern-day slavery has assumed a global status, encompassing all the continents of the world. It is reported that human trafficking is “the fastest growing criminal industry in the world” and “the world’s third-largest criminal enterprise, after drug dealing and gun running” (Lipede, 2007, p.3). This lends credence to the uncontrolled widespread of this 21st-century cancerous ailment troubling contemporary human society.

Various attempts have been made to define human trafficking. The Cambodian Women’s Development Agency (1996, p. 1), for instance, views it as “the practice of taking people outside their support structure and rendering them powerless”. This definition specifically views human trafficking as the act of moving humans from their *in-situ* to another place where they are disempowered. This disempowerment could be physical, emotional, sexual and financial. Victims often experience loss of freedom in all its facets as they have no control, even over their bodies. Human trafficking is equally described as the process whereby

A migrant is illicitly engaged (recruited, kidnapped, sold, etc.) and/or moved, either within national or across international borders; [and] intermediaries (traffickers) during any part of this process obtain economic or other profit by means of deception, coercion, and other

forms of exploitation under conditions that violate the fundamental rights of migrants (Pearson, 2002, pp. 15-16).

While this definition is more robust and broader, its limitation is shown in its criminalising human trafficking and neglecting other numerous scopes, including illegal adoptions, involuntary marriages, forced labour and human organ removal (Bermudez, 2008, p. 60). Besides, the definition does not capture the violation of human rights, which is central to the operation of human trafficking. The United Nations' definition seems more encompassing. According to the U.N., human trafficking, also christened "trafficking in persons", is described as:

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. (2012, p. 34).

The above definition emphasises three main aspects of human trafficking: the act, the means/instrumentation and the purpose. Acts of human trafficking listed in the definition are recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat, force or other forms of coercion. According to Nina Mollema (2013, p. 35), most of the foregoing trafficking activities indicate the movement of people from one place to another. Most often, this movement includes cross-border trafficking, which is the trafficking of persons across national borders. Thus, the dimension of intra-national trafficking is not captured. "Nowhere is there explicit mention made of human trafficking solely within a country's borders (internal trafficking)" (Mollema, 2013, p. 35). Thus, the currency of internal human trafficking validates the need to update this view about human trafficking.

Several studies have been carried out on human trafficking by individuals, governmental agencies and concerned non-governmental organisations. Some of

the studies can bring to the fore the horror and enormity of the challenge of human trafficking. For instance, Lipede (2007), Okoro (2007) and Barkindo (2007) examine the concept from the economic point of view. They address problems of insecurity in the nation's borders and factors aiding the unchecked proliferation of trafficking across borders.

From the literary perspective, there have not been adequate studies on the subject of human trafficking. Shalini Nadaswaran (2012) examines how the effect of Nigeria's descent into a neo-liberal economic structure has left its women vulnerable to transnational crimes of human trafficking, commonly referred to as modern-day slavery, specifically focusing on sex trafficking as a form of neo-liberal economic commodity. She compares Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo*, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. Her investigation gives a first-hand account of the business of trafficking women, the geographies of globalisation that generate conditions for such trafficking, as well as the reimaging of trafficking through resistance displayed by female characters who challenge the complex relations of power with their traffickers.

Moreover, Cockbain and Wortley's (2015) work examines the internal (domestic) sex trafficking of British children using unique data from six major police investigations. Internal sex trafficking (sometimes known as 'street grooming') has been popularly conceptualised as a highly sophisticated, skilled and well-organised phenomenon. The work shows that this characterisation does not withstand empirical scrutiny. Instead, the routine activities and everyday associations of both offenders and victims are shown to play key roles in facilitating, sustaining and spreading the abuse. While the criminal acts associated with internal child sex trafficking can be atrocious, the people, places and processes involved are shown to be far from exceptional (Cockbain & Wortley, 2015). This investigation is highly analytical and instructive; however, it is not from the literary perspective that the current paper aims to achieve.

Furthermore, Patricia Bastida-Rodríguez (2011) interrogates Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* and the ways in which it challenges readers' expectations by focusing

on migrants' experience from an unconventional perspective which includes male focalisation, the use of genre fiction and the depiction of immigrant communities different from Ali's in terms of cultural background and time of arrival. Bastida-Rodríguez (2011) argues that by offering a crime fiction plot and exploring a man in crisis, the novel resists classification and provides a thought-provoking reflection on migrants' exploitation in 21st-century Britain.

The following highlighted extant studies are germane to this paper. Nevertheless, they have not been able to sufficiently discuss the role of the socio-economic and political indices in the continual growth of modern-day slavery in the Nigerian context. Besides, the two primary texts purposely selected for this paper have not enjoyed a robust discussion in terms of literary scholarship. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that this paper investigates postcolonial realities and the emergence of human trafficking in Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*.

Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* were purposely selected for this paper due to their in-depth representations of the trope of human trafficking. The narratives are subjected to textual analysis. Specifically, the paper examines postcolonial indices fuelling the unchecked proliferation of human trafficking, as well as the narrative aesthetics deployed to foreground the monstrosity of modern-day slavery in the selected texts. Another identifiable lacuna in some extant studies cited above is silence on the deployed narrative styles. Thus, this paper examines both the matter and its manner of representation.

3. Postcolonial Theory

In examining postcolonial realities and the emergence of human trafficking in Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*, postcolonial theory is adopted as the theoretical framework. Postcolonial theory postulates hypothetical assumptions and socio-political concerns on the experience and literary production of formerly colonised peoples whose history is characterised by extreme political, social, and psychological dislocation and oppression (Lois Tyson,

1999). Postcolonial concepts, such as alterity, othering/ordering, unhomeliness, subalternisation and dislocation propounded by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2001) are employed to investigate the power relations between human traffickers and trafficked victims in the selected narratives.

Alterity and othering are often used interchangeably to mean the state of non-belongingness, exclusion and outsideness. It is reflected in literature through the polarisation or ordering of society into 'I' and the 'other'. The hegemonic/dominating 'I' usually exerts power and authority over the powerless/disempowered 'other'. Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2001, p.73) expound that unhomeliness is a term often used to describe the experience of dislocation. The authors link the concept to Heidegger's term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit*— which literally implies 'unhousedness' or 'not-at-home-ness'—sometimes translated as 'uncanny' or 'uncanniness'. It is noteworthy that unhomeliness is quite different from homelessness or *homelessness*. It concerns the psychological feeling of not being at home in one's spatial home. Most citizens of postcolonial countries of the world often experience unhomeliness given certain hellish realities that have made their polities un conducive to living.

In postcolonial parlance, subaltern means the poor and oppressed members of society who could be peasants, working class and other groups of individuals denied access to power and other social benefits. Subalternisation, therefore, is the process by which the hegemonic and powerful class mistreats the subaltern (the oppressed) by rendering them voiceless. Dislocation is the "occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event" (Ashcroft et al., 2001, p.73). It usually occurs as a result of migration from one country to another either through voluntary or involuntary means such as slavery/human trafficking or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location. The preceding postcolonial concepts are deployed in interpreting the complexity and praxis of human trafficking in the selected 21st-century Nigerian novels.

4. Postcolonial Indices Fuelling Human Trafficking in Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*

Several factors are responsible for the growth and persistent existence of human trafficking, which is a cancerous menace of the twenty-first century. These factors can be conveniently divided into two: push-and-pull factors. Formalising her “push-pull” migration theory, Everett Lee (1966) attempts to explain the causes and trends of international migration. The theorist introduces the term ‘push-and-pull’ factors to explain that citizens of postcolonial nations often migrate to developed nations for greener pastures. Migratory individuals are stimulated by the level of industrialisation and development, technological advancement, adequate security, respect for fundamental human rights, employment opportunities, etc., which is contrary to the dystopian realities by which the developing countries are characterised. Some of the factors identified to have fuelled human trafficking include poverty, social imbalances, uneven development, official corruption, gender discrimination, harmful and barbaric cultural practices, civil unrest, natural disasters and lack of political will to curb the menace (UNO, 2012, p.2).

Lipede (2007) identifies poverty as a major push factor in the proliferation of human trafficking. Ajaegbo's narrator-protagonist, Nita, is confused and narrates what has pushed her to follow her fiendish boyfriend to this hellish city: “I came because he promised me a new life. Something different from the one I had always known. He promised a future filled with possibilities” (*Sarah House*, 30). Her search for new opportunities, new life and comfort, different from her environmental disastrous and degradation-ridden Niger Delta area, leads to expatriation consciousness. Slim has told Nita about Port Harcourt and other cities where there are many possibilities and achievements. Reality dawns on the erstwhile naïve and unsuspecting young ladies when they come to the realisation that Slim has promised those utopian realities that he himself cannot attain. They are made to believe in what is beyond their limitations back at home: “He gave us hope that even he did not have” (*Sarah House*, p. 31). Going by this depiction, it is

shown that the same economic factor drives both the perpetrators and victims of human trafficking.

Besides, victims are unsuspecting and frustrated Nigerians. Problems in the country make them wish to search for greener pastures. Civil unrest, high levels of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and political violence are some of the other factors that push out Nigerian youths. This is in line with Olutayo C. Adesina and Akanmu G. Adebayo's (2009) assertion that the margin of survival of the Africans in their country or a land of sojourn is extremely narrow and precarious.

Moreover, Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* lamentably recounts Tina's relationship with her mother, Teni Omaku, whom she depicts as a workaholic. Tina lives on the outskirts of Lagos with her parents and siblings. Her mother is privileged to have a primary school leaving certificate at a time when female education is seen as an anathema. She ventures into different businesses to provide for her children. On the other hand, Tina's father, Simon Omaku, is a factory worker who does things modestly. He drives all kinds of vehicles. In addition to his work in a factory, he rents a piece of land, which he cultivates after the day's work at the factory to provide enough for the family. Simon Omaku is, thus, depicted as a responsible, committed and diligent father who does not shirk his responsibilities even though things are hard for him. Omaku's apartment is always saturated with people as his house is a meeting place for different categories of people. Through the use of foreshadowing, the narrator-protagonist envisages the untimely demise of Tina's mother, who often tells her (Tina):

When I am no longer here, you will be the woman of the family! It is a major responsibility, believe me! You must learn how to be responsible and reasonable. When I am no longer here, it will be too late. I will no longer be here, it will be too late. I will no longer be able to help you. (*My Life Has a Price*, p. 18)

Unfortunately, Tina's mother gives up the ghost while delivering her fourth child. Symbolically, the death of her mother and a stillborn baby foreshadow the

castration of Tina's hope and aspiration later in life. The arrival of another woman in Omaku's house following Tina's mother's death heralds tragedy into the home. Tina expresses inner resentment about the presence of Lami, who has come to occupy the space left behind by her late mother. Tina perceives Lami as an "other" (stranger) just as she is also treated by her adoptive parents in France; she is seen as a subaltern who has no voice. Thus, Tina suffers domestic violence, mistreatment and exploitation at the hands of her stepmother, Lami.

My Life Has a Price depicts some realities that contribute to the susceptibility of victims to being trapped by their "hunters". First of all, Tina is exposed to domestic violence. In addition, her father tells her unequivocally: "In Nigeria, you will never be able to pursue your studies.... There is nothing good for you here. If Linda and Godwin take you with them to France, you have a better life, and you can go to University" (*My Life Has a Price*, p. 28). Here, Simon Omaku equates staying in Nigeria with an unfulfillable dream, disillusionment, hopelessness and backwardness. "The despondency-ridden mood of Nigerian polity aggravates pessimistic tendency" (Olaniyan, 2020, p. 79) in Simon Omaku. Okoro (2007) maintains that there is an increase in the demand for babies and young children for illegal adoption. Parents from developing countries are reported to have been willingly selling their own children for unlawful trafficking and adoption. As Okoro (2007) maintains, the commonest reason for child trafficking is for the purpose of being employed as domestic servants. Tina's experience is vividly captured in the foregoing submission. The narrator vividly reveals the extremely economic harsh reality confronting the family. At home (Nigeria), Tina's dream of a university education remains a mirage as the nation's educational sector is fraught with various problems.

It is this desire for better living conditions abroad that makes some Nigerians to be trapped in this merchandise in human flesh. Homi Bhabha (1994) coined the word 'unhomeliness' to capture this situation. According to Bhabha (1994), being 'unhomed' is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home, even in one's own home, because one is not at home in oneself: one's

cultural identity crisis has made one a psychological refugee, so to speak. The term “home” is used to mean multiple locations that allow a sense of belonging and identity at a given moment, which include the nation.

Economic hardship is another main reality that fuels human trafficking. Since no one wishes to experience poverty, people do all they can to liberate themselves from its shackles. One may not, however, blame some of the victims of human trafficking. The nation’s political leaders are not ready to make life and living in the country comfortable for the citizenry. If the country is made conducive, no one would like to leave the country seeking greener pastures elsewhere. Poverty, therefore, aids the displacement and dispossession of citizens of developed countries like Nigeria. According to Adewumi and Omobowale (2016), displacement is a global phenomenon which has plagued human existence. The powerful often displace the weak in order to gain advantages which they consider of value to them. The reason for this is not necessarily logical, as others may be displaced to satisfy the pride or need for assertiveness of the powerful individual or nation. Africans experienced displacement during the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic slave trades. The dispersal of Africans across Europe and America drastically changed the composition of the world, and we now have the black diaspora across the Atlantic. Before the inception of the Trans-Sahara slave trade, internal slavery, war, epidemics, and migration had led to several types of dislocation in Africa and other parts of the world. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1997, p.9) aver that:

a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.

This kind of displacement is beyond physical and geographical movement. It includes psychological, cultural, religious, socio-political and traditional dislocation

of the personhood of a people. Their sense of identity is threatened with obliteration if defiant means are not consciously deployed to rescue it from complete ruination. It is observed that the displacement of victims of modern-day slavery, which leads to their dispossession, is induced by postcolonial disillusionment. Nwahunanya (2012, p.440) criticises the government's lackadaisical attitude towards the suffering masses: "...our government is not very concerned with people of this category; those people that live in places where there is no access to roads, water, where refuse heaps are their companion..." In the opinion of this literary critic, the scene painted here constitutes a national tragedy that should be addressed. The push-and-pull factors responsible for both intrinsic and extrinsic exilic consciousness in contemporary Nigeria are reflections of a tragic situation. Hence, writers have continued to tirelessly keep 'singing' because

those who are being addressed by these writers are like deaf people; they have refused to hear, they behave like blind people, refusing to see what the writer is pointing at. They will prefer the writer keeps silent. But the writer cannot close his eyes (Nwahunanya, 2012, p.440)

Furthermore, Nigeria is confronted with cases of high unemployment and underemployment. Nigerian higher learning institutions produce thousands of graduates yearly without hope of gainful employment. Hence, one of the alternatives for the teeming unemployed youths is to leave Nigerian soil for overseas in search of greener pastures. Frustration, economic hardship and hellish realities remain strong push factors that breed the untrammelled growth of modern-day slavery.

Apart from the above-identified postcolonial indices that keep fuelling modern-day slavery in developing countries like Nigeria, there are pull factors that usually entice victims and traffickers. Thus, as Cynthia Wolken (2006, p.409) points out:

human trafficking does not occur in social and political isolation. When the circumstances that allow for and support the forceful theft of human

labour are deconstructed, human trafficking is squarely located within the larger context of workers' rights, immigrant rights and human rights.

Olayinka Akanle (2009) posits that the United Kingdom is the favoured destination country by Nigerians after the United States. The immigrants usually arrive legally only to overstay or take up employment in breach of their visa. Many Nigerians migrate to developed countries for economic purposes - mainly unemployment and poverty, which are central, and exert an overarching influence. Poverty is a reality in Nigeria, and the possibility of it abating is not on the horizon. The prevalence of graduate unemployment is tangible, much less than that of the not-so-educated. The passion to travel out becomes very pressing when the possibility of improving the quality of life appears very little or non-existent.

Agho (1995) maintains that the postcolonial literature of Africa is replete with the seeds of disillusion, dissociation and alienation, which have snowballed into disappointment, frustration, anger, cynicism and self-contempt. Akanle (2009) avers that a lot of Nigerians who immigrate to the United Kingdom are educated, young and ambitious and consider their chances of furthering at home irrelevant and needless since they do not trust the educational system of Nigeria to be of standard among the best in the world. Haynes (2012, p.522), an American scholar who lived and worked in Nigeria for several years, narrates his experience thus:

I came to care deeply about the Nigerian university system, and it was heartbreaking to watch its progressive ruin. Many of my friends from those days now teach in Europe or North America. They were driven out of the Nigerian universities by the need to take care of their families, which they could hardly do on the salaries they were being paid...

What is presented above is the pathetic reality that has pushed many people out of their motherland to search for greener pastures abroad. However, life is not as easy as imagined abroad. Haynes (2012, p.522) further corroborates this, explaining the unfavourable situations Nigerian migrants encounter in other

countries: “Nigerians living abroad will all tell you that life in North America and Europe is not easy. In the U.S., in particular, academic life is very demanding.” This contradicts Nigerian migrants’ aspiration for a utopian society which perhaps exists nowhere. Victims of human trafficking later realise the veracity of the preceding assertion following their involuntary ‘dispersal’ to other lands.

Furthermore, the fate of some victims of human trafficking is determined by their relations. To liberate their wards from economic austerity, some parents send them abroad. After all the legal processes, Tina officially becomes the daughter of Okparas, and she is moved to join the rest of the family in France. The Okparas deploy deception to bait Tina. The seemingly endless socio-political unrest in the country has been a push factor aiding human trafficking. Nigeria is, no doubt, confronted with security challenges. This is, however, the outcome of inequality, anger and bitterness among the people. Nigeria has been reduced to a dystopian state due to its hellish living situation. Therefore, many Nigerians are arrested in psychological limbo, which does not merely result from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the psycho-cultural displacement within which one lives.

Perpetrators and masterminds of human trafficking include parents of victims, neighbours, friends, agents and victims themselves. Nita is trafficked by her boyfriend; she does not know the personality of Slim until she gets to Sarah House. The identity of Slim is disclosed when Tega asks Nita: “Who brought you here?” (*Sarah House*, p. 15), to which Nita replies “Slim. He is my boyfriend” (p. 15). Tega lets Nita know the truth about Slim: “Slim is not your boyfriend. That little **worm** is no one’s boyfriend.” (p. 16, emphasis added). Representing Slim as a ‘worm’ is a metaphorisation of human trafficking as a societal ailment/disease that should be urgently gotten rid of. Meanwhile, in the case of Tina in Okpara’s *My Life Has a Price*, her trafficking is masterminded by her biological father (though unknown to him) and perpetrated by their neighbours. Simon Omaku wants the best for her daughter. That is why he tries all he can to ensure that his daughter is relocated to a ‘better’ place where she will be able to fulfil her life ambition.

Unfortunately, his daughter is trapped as the hellish condition at home is more heavenly than the prison-like realities in France. Lending his voice to the ongoing war against trafficking, Okoro (2007, p.49) establishes the role of parents in the migration of their children:

To cut down dependence on the reduced incomes, parents allowed or encouraged their children to migrate to the big plantations, mines and factories and more generally to the big cities in the region in order to find something to do as well as a way of reducing dependence on the meagre income of the family.

The historical picture that Okoro (2007) paints above is not in any way different from the present reality, which has now snowballed into another form of trans-border slave trade as innocent children are moved from one place to another through encouragement and support of their parents or guardians either consciously or unconsciously. Othering/ordering occurs in Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* and Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*. The victims of human trafficking are *othered/ordered* by their traffickers. Although Tina is not an alien to her stepmother, Lami, she is treated like the 'other', which foregrounds her 'exotopy' or 'outsideness' to the personality of Lami.

Furthermore, another postcolonial reality fuelling modern-day slavery in Nigeria, as depicted in the selected texts, is the compromise of security agents. Security personnel's collusion with human traffickers makes the war against this social scourge an impossible one. The problems of insecurity, human trafficking and exploitation proliferate through the collusion of the security agents. It then becomes impossible for them to curb the menace of human trafficking since they are friends with those who perpetrate and promote these inhumane acts. Out of naivety, Nita suggests that they should go and report to the police, but Tega says

The police are their friends, Nita. They give them a lot of bribes and other gifts, so when you run to them, they simply lock you up and call Slim or

Fatty or one of the more terrible boys to come and take you back. (Sarah House, p. 34)

Security agencies that are supposed to provide refuge for the oppressed and the maltreated in the polity have compromised and connived with criminals. Victims of various forms of anti-social acts have lost trust and confidence in the security personnel.

Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* explores intra-national human trafficking, which attests to the fact that the postcolonial nations are the ones re-colonising themselves this time. Nita and the other girls are 'uprooted' from Opobo and 'transported' to Port Harcourt, where they are made to attend nightclubs and parties to satisfy men's sexual impulses. Port Harcourt is plagued with numerous nightclubs which draw young girls and those men who prey on them like flame-drawn moths. Not all young ladies attending these nightclubs are forced to attend. Some willingly come to sell their soul, dignity and humanhood to the "demons who ruled the night for a piece of the fortune and glamour" (*Sarah House*, p. 58), and there are others who are lured there, locked up and forced to sleep with total strangers. Back at home in Opobo, Slim promises Nita a new life full of glamour, opportunities, a good education and the freedom to be and do whatever she likes. According to Nita, "I followed him because I was ready to escape the confines of the small village beside the river that flowed to the Atlantic" (*Sarah House*, p. 24).

Furthermore, pull factors continue to lure people out of their cultural and political polity. The large-scale immigration waves to European countries are brought about by poverty, the seeming lack of opportunities at home for many youths, and the lure of the "good life" in Europe. Although the case of some immigrants is paradoxical, in the sense that they have alternative means of survival at home, they are lured by the "European Dream". Other factors motivating perpetrators and victims of human trafficking alike include religious tolerance and relative peace abroad.

One major strategy employed by human traffickers to trap their victims is deception. In Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* and Okpara's *My Life Has a Price*, victims of human trafficking are deceived by their traffickers. Nita is deceived by her boyfriend, who masterminds her 'sale', while Linda and Godwin mislead Tina's father and her uncle by making unfulfillable promises. Since the girls could not afford to transport themselves overseas, their sponsors provided them with everything they needed, telling them they had enough time to pay back their debts. Consequently, some victims are subjected to peonage.

5. Representations of Human Trafficking in Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* and Okpara's *My Life Has a Price*: Points of Convergence and Divergence

The 21st-century Nigerian novels selected for this paper demonstrate both trans-border and intra-national movements. The experience in Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* is quite different in the sense that the trafficked girls are still kept in the country, though in another city. It is, thus, an intra-national migration. Tina Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* is a painful homodiegetic narrative that, through jeremiad, laments the pains and pangs its protagonist suffers at the hands of her inhuman adopters (abductors). Tina is a sixteen-year-old girl who is forced to migrate to France. A major motif of postcolonial writing has to do with place and displacement (Minh-ha, 1995). According to Ashcroft (2001), the notion of place is the interactive convergence of language, history, spatiality and environment in the experience of colonised peoples. In the same way, that colonisation disrupts the colonised subject's sense of place, human trafficking brings about the dislocation and relocation to trafficked subjects. Displacement may occur as a result of transportation from one nation to the other through slavery, imprisonment, invasion, settlement or a consequence of (in)voluntary movement from a known location to an unknown one. In contemporary times, human trafficking has proven to be a means of displacement and dispossession of citizens of many postcolonial nations, within and across borders.

Similarly, these postcolonial Nigerian texts dwell on the hegemonic representations of human trafficking disseminated by the mainstream media,

which focuses primarily on (generally foreign and local) cruel traffickers and abject victims. Most importantly, the texts depict the neo-liberal economic model based on exclusion and inequality that generates this trafficking (Reinares, 2015). In narrating human trafficking, the two novels deploy multiple settings as the storylines move from one spatial setting to the other. The migrancy of the setting is influenced by that of the characters. Characters in the narratives are always on the move; they move from one country or city to the other in search of comfort.

Moreover, even though the indices fuelling the scourge of human trafficking both within and across borders as well as the modus operandi deployed by perpetrators, are similar, Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* represents human trafficking as a transnational crime, while Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* depicts it from intranational stance. These two authors, through their portrayals of modern-day slavery, therefore, foreground the existence of the social challenge as an international and intranational issue. Flagged off by the forced and extremely dehumanising and traumatising movement of the slave trade, migration from the African continent to the rest of the world has subsequently taken different forms, one of which is human trafficking (Amuwo, 2009). As shown in this paper, modern-day slavery can take both international and intra-national dimensions. It is international when victims are drifted to other countries. On the other hand, intra-national migration has to do with the carting away of trafficked victims from their original homes to another place but within the country. This representation implies that to curb human trafficking, both individual nations and all nations of the world need to take decisive actions severally and collectively as the issue has become a global one that should concern everyone.

Although the points of convergence in the two narratives are more than those of divergence, there are some noticeable disjuncture in their representations of human trafficking. Ajaegbo is a male writer, while Okpara is a female writer. The divergence in the sex of the two writers implies that the challenge of human trafficking is of serious concern to both male and female writers. Besides, it is also observed that Okpara's *My Life Has a Price* is a memoir, whereas Ajaegbo's

Sarah House is purely fictional. Okpara chronicles her trafficking experience by the Okparas who adopted her in real life. The narrative is thus a kind of life writing – autobiographic narration.

6. Deployed Narrative Strategies

The novelists employ certain narrative devices in portraying human trafficking in their works. To a large extent, these devices significantly contribute to the thematic exploration of the subject matter – human trafficking.

In *My Life Has a Price*, the panoramic spatial settings are Nigeria and France. Meanwhile, the narrative navigates through various parts of France. The mobility by which the settings in *Sarah House* and *My Life Has a Price* are characterised reiterates the problems of rootlessness, rooflessness and restlessness to which the trafficked victims are subjected. The employment of a multiplicity of settings establishes the issue of dislocation, which forms part of the experiences of the trafficked victims. Dislocation involves the instance of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. It can be occasioned by transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement, or a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to an unknown location (Ashcroft et al., 2001). Both Nita and Tina who are the major characters in the two texts move from “the imperial ‘Home’ to the colonial margin” (Ashcroft et al., 2001, p.73) as a result of ‘push-and-pull’ factors which are postcolonial indices fuelling the continuous growth of modern-day slavery.

Moreover, Ajaegbo and Okpara make use of contrast in their characterology. This is very glaring in the characters of Slim and Fatty (in *Sarah House*). They are directly opposite each other. Slim is physically thin, while Fatty is chubby. Both reflect the names they bear. This characterisation, no doubt, implies that people of different shapes, sizes, complexions and ancestries engage in such nefarious acts as human trafficking in real human society. Similarly, the separation of Tina’s living apartment from the rest of Okparas further foregrounds a binary dichotomy in the

family. The characters in the two texts can be broadly categorised into oppressors (traffickers and others that mastermind the act) and the oppressed (trafficked victims).

Furthermore, *Sarah House* is fraught with instances of irony. For example, one would have expected Madam, a one-time victim of human trafficking, to have stood against the perpetration of the act; ironically, she proliferates it by setting up her own 'venture'. In the same vein, Madam's establishment of an orphanage with Sarah House is never towards helping the wandering orphans. Instead, she 'rears' them so that they may be helpful in the future as she sacrifices Damka, whose body parts she later sells. Another ironic scene is when Stone, Madam's bodyguard, allows Nita to escape from the prison-like Sarah House. Stone is known for devilish acts, as he does not condone nonsense from any of the Madam's girls. One, therefore, wonders when the same Stone that has reported Nita's connivance with Inspector Mofe to Madam will eventually mastermind Nita's liberation.

Another identifiable narrative aesthetics employed in the representations of human trafficking in the narratives is the use of a homodiegetic narrator. Jahn (2005, p.6) explains that "in a homodiegetic narrative, the story is told by a (homodiegetic) narrator who is also one of the story's acting characters. The prefix 'homo-' points to the fact that the individual who acts as a narrator is also a character on the level of action." In other words, the homodiegetic narrator is one of the characters whom the writer adopts to narrate the story. This makes the narrative to be first-person narrative. Ajaegbo's and Okpara's employment of a first-person narrator lends credibility to the testimonial nature of the narratives. In other words, the victims (Nita and Tina) are the ones who chronicle their own experiences. Nita and Tina are, thus, both the homodiegetic narrators and heroines in the narratives. Through the depiction of Nita's and Tina's personal stories, Ajaego and Okpara have publicised private issues. According to Omotoso (1979, p.9), "the major process of characterisation in the radical novel is the making of public issues the very issue of private concern. Thus, the characters are not preoccupied with issues which absolutely concerned with themselves and their immediate families alone".

Omotoso's (1979) position is in line with Jameson's (1986, p.69) assertion that "the story of a private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society". Ajaegbo and Okpara adopt Nita's and Tina's personal experiences to relay societal challenges. Therefore, all the characters in the texts are representational. This means they are used to depict the global challenge humanity faces in the contemporary period.

Moreover, in representing human trafficking in the narratives, the writers deploy symbolic characterisation in portraying their characters. The naming and actions of characters like Slim, Fatty, Living Statue and Stone are symbolic. All these characters serve as accomplices to human traffickers. For instance, Living Statue and Stone imply the characters' soullessness, heartlessness, inhumaneness, wickedness, toughness and rigidity. In the same vein, the name Slim suggests the *slimness* and *unfulfillability* of his promise to provide a better life for Tina whom he surreptitiously traffics.

7. Conclusion

Human trafficking remains one of the means of human mobility in the 21st century which has led to the involuntary dispersion of Nigerians and indeed humans across the globe. It is revealed that some socio-economic and political happenings in the country have contributed to the unhindered growth of modern-day slavery. In Okpara's *My Life has a Price* and Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*, postcolonial indices that ventilate the proliferation of human trafficking include poverty, connivance of security personnel with human traffickers, unemployment, family disintegration, leniency of the judiciary, death of the breadwinner, corruption and trafficked victims' materialistic inclinations. Traffickers capitalise on the foregoing realities to 'capture' their victims and subject them to dispossession, subalternisation, *inbetweenness*, *othering/ordering* and 'exotopy' or 'outsideness'. The narratives are presented from the point of view of homodiegetic narrators which establishes the verisimilitude and objectivity of the representations. The preponderance of multiple settings in the texts also lends credence to the migritudinal temper and restless lifestyle of the victims. Being social conscience and socially committed

writers, twenty-first-century Nigerian novelists engage their creativity in depicting the social iniquity of human trafficking in their works.

Declaration of conflict of interest

We declare that we have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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