

Narratives of Human Trafficking: A Review Article

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ABSTRACT

This review provides an insight of the rising issue of human trafficking, which is an ongoing issue that affects millions of people around the world each year and it is referred to by many scholars as a modern-day slavery. Since human trafficking is drastically increasing, many authors depicted the suffering of victims of human trafficking in their literary works, consequently, leading scholars to investigate this issue in these literary works from various perspectives. There are many forms of human trafficking, yet the scope of the current review focuses on the studies conducted on three main forms only which are: sex trafficking, child trafficking and forced labor, highlighting the narratives employed by traffickers to traffic their victims. These forms are among the top three forms that are perpetrated worldwide whether in poor or wealthy countries. Thus, this review provides a survey of the past written literature on these three forms of human trafficking within the literary context.

Keywords: Human trafficking, child trafficking, forced labor, sex trafficking

سَرديات الإتجار بالبشر: مقالة استعراضية

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الملخص

يقدم هذا الاستعراض نظرة على قضية الاتجار بالبشر المتزايدة، وهي قضية مستمرة تؤثر على ملايين الأشخاص حول العالم سنوياً، ويُشار إليها من قبل العديد من الباحثين كنوع من العبودية الحديثة. ومع الزيادة الحادة في الاتجار بالبشر، قام العديد من المؤلفين بتصوير معاناة ضحايا الاتجار بالبشر في أعمالهم الأدبية، مما دفع الباحثين إلى دراسة هذه القضية في هذه الأعمال من زوايا مختلفة. هناك العديد من أشكال الاتجار بالبشر، ومع ذلك يركز نطاق هذا الاستعراض الحالي على الدراسات التي أجريت على ثلاثة أشكال رئيسية فقط وهي: الإتجار بالجنس، الإتجار بالأطفال، والعمل القسري، مع تسليط الضوء على السرديات التي يستخدمها المتاجرون للإيقاع بضحاياهم. هذه الأشكال هي من بين الأشكال الثلاثة الأكثر شيوعاً التي تُرتكب على مستوى العالم سواء في البلدان الفقيرة أو الغنية. وعليه، يقدم هذا الاستعراض مسألاً للأدب المكتوب سابقاً حول هذه الأشكال الثلاثة من الاتجار بالبشر في السياق الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإتجار بالبشر، الإتجار بالأطفال، العمل القسري، الإتجار بالجنس.

INTRODUCTION

This review is dedicated to survey the previously written literature about the issue of human trafficking. It reviews the academic studies that have studied human trafficking within literary context as it is the aim of this review. Human trafficking is a rising problem that affects millions of victims each year around the globe. An issue with this massive impact on people's life would normally be reflected in the world literature. This issue is closely related to slavery and many scholars in the field look to it as "modern-day-slavery", saying this does not mean that this review will go through studies done on slavery throughout all ages within the literary context, rather it delves into studies done on human trafficking during the postmodern era as a main aim of the review. There are different kinds of human trafficking victims like Sex Trafficking and Prostitution, Forced Labor, Bonded Labor, Children Exploited for Commercial Sex, Forced Child Labor, Involuntary Domestic Servitude, Child Sex Tourism and other forms (Todres 2005). The review focuses primarily on only three forms, sex trafficking, child trafficking and forced labor, thus this review will be designated to these

three forms only. Consequently, the review will be divided into three sections. Sex trafficking, child trafficking and forced labor.

DISCUSSION

Sex Trafficking within the Literary Context

This section addresses studies done on sex trafficking within the literary context. This form of trafficking is among the most notable forms of trafficking. It is a profitable trade for the traffickers that pours them millions of dollars every year. These traffickers lure the girls in countries with a fragile security system and promise these victims of getting them a better life in the destination country. A lot of the victims don't know that they are going to be working in the sex industry rather they are usually trapped and can't do anything about it. Also, since most of these victims are women, they are vulnerable and can't survive unless they comply with the demands of the traffickers. These atrocities have led a lot of authors to write about this issue globally in order to find solutions, raise awareness, and stop this heinous crime against humanity. Therefore, this section will provide the literature review within the literary context about sex trafficking.

As has been previously mentioned, sex trafficking is among the most known forms of human trafficking. It has been approached by writers in literature significantly which in terms have led the scholars to investigate this issue. For instance, in her article "We all like to think we've saved somebody:" Sex Trafficking in Literature" (2012) Donna M. Bickford sheds the light on sex trafficking narratives and its relationship with the social perception and the efforts for social change. It integrates literary criticism with cultural analysis to examine a variety of text genres, such as reports from mainstream media and two types of sex trafficking novels. Throughout her analysis, she examines novels that depict victims of sex trafficking like Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold* (2006) and James Levine's *The Blue Notebook* (2009). Each narrative includes

elements of familial collision, fraud, and deception as part of the actual trafficking process. She argues that when these characters write about their experiences, literacy acts as a place of survival and a coping strategy, allowing their own ideas and feelings to take prominence and be acknowledged. She concludes that the capability of narrative to inspire actions aimed at ending sex trafficking.

Dramatically speaking, even actors who are supposed to reflect the agony and suffering of these victims are stigmatized. In a study done by Sophie Bush entitled "Putting on the red boots: role-play as 'coping work' and 'creative work' in the theatrical representation of prostitution" (2017) she investigates the representation of various forms of prostitution in plays that depict the victims of human trafficking characters. One of the selected plays she examines is *Roadkill* by Cora Bissett and Stef Smith (2012). The study claims that the role-playing, which is an enlightening, empowering, and effective theoretical device that "allows participants to imagine new possibilities and test new strategies, playing around the boundaries of their identity and experimenting with self in a safe, controlled environment" (Bush, 2017, p.3). Prostitution does not present the role-play of prostitutes as a positive or empowering strategy. It can, however, be seen as a form of coping work, which is just doing what the script tells you to do.

In her book, *Sex Trafficking in Postcolonial Literature* (2014), Laura Barberán Reinares argues that currently the social sciences are the source of the majority of research on sexual assault, so by analyzing depictions of sex trafficking in postcolonial literature, the book offers a unique viewpoint on this subject. She adds that in-depth analysis of postcolonial literature in both English and Spanish as well as sex trafficking using literary theory, anthropology, sociology, history, trauma theory, journalism, and globalization studies are all included in her book. In order to provide a thorough examination of the subject that goes

beyond the Orientalist discourse that is so common in the media, it integrates research from the social sciences, psychology, anthropology, and economics with postcolonial theory and literature's aesthetic analysis of sex trafficking.

African literature is sadly prolific with literary works about sex trafficking, due to the fact that these countries are among the top countries in which human trafficking rates are high. In their article "Depictions of Human Trafficking and Exploitation in Contemporary Africa Using Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* and Apio Eunice Otuku's *Zura Maids*" (2022) Johnson, Charles and Denis reflect this notion. The article examines the impact of human trafficking and exploitation on teenage girls in Uganda and Nigeria, using content analysis to analyze postcolonial concepts. The study reveals that conflict, unemployment, and illiteracy, as well as corruption, public disturbances, and strikes, contribute to the girls' chance of being trafficked. The authors of the novels effectively portray human trafficking through narrative techniques, raising awareness and highlighting the need for better representation.

Dealing with the same novel, *Trafficked* (2008), Luke and Chidozie examine the novel using the feminist approach in their paper "Towards Solving Cultural Problems: A Feminist Reading of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*". (2022) The study argues that Akachi's novel is a classic feminist work, blending literary aesthetics with feminist voice. It highlights dehumanization and oppression of women, with male characters being manipulative and patriarchal, while women are depicted as caring and diligent. The study also highlights prostitution as a lucrative international business, with many girls trafficked without consent.

Similarly, Uchena David Uwakwe deals with the novel from feminist and post-colonial perspectives in his paper "A Rhetoric on Conflicts in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*" (2018). The study

contrasts the author's previous works with a more amiable female character. The narrative mediates feminist conflicts and addresses postcolonial issues, particularly colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. While symbols like the Ihite-Agu God and goddess draw parallels with the trafficking enterprise. The novel is interpreted as addressing the psychic deformation of various criminals in society and the urgency of their reformation.

Using the same novel, Ordu, Egu and Nkechinyere refer to the notion of gender in their paper "Gender: A Matter of Questioning in Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*' (2022). Gender studies in social science studies compare roles and interests between men and women, focusing on social experiences rather than biological differences. Their study examines *Trafficked*, focusing on black African women's humanity. They argue that as civilization evolves, women should be empowered to stand up for their rights and be treated with respect.

Similarly, Isabella Villanova in her study "Human Rights, Human Wrongs: Gender and the Affective Dimensions of Sex Trafficking in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*' (2022) draws the attention to gender as the main motive behind making the women more desirable to the traffickers. She argues that the main factor contributing to the inequalities that African women experience both inside and outside of the continent is their gender. The characters in the novel are subject to social constraints but are also active actors who are able to reject the limitations placed upon them by patriarchy.

Living in poor societies is one of the main causes of trafficking as seen in Nnyagu, Ugwuafia, Onunkwo, and Ike's "Depravity in Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*" (2023). Since a lot of people indulge themselves in illegal activities in order to survive the harsh conditions they face. Children are trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and other illegal actions. They assert that corrupt politicians are involved in

the spread of such activities as they have agents who operate in the trafficking networks. This, they argue, has led creative writers to write about this issue to show the society this kind of corruption. Their paper examines the novel *Sarah House* to show these realities and to expose its effects on people.

Away from thematic studies, Ikenna Kamalu focuses on the role of the language in his paper "Body as Capital: Construing Experiential Knowledge of Prostitution and Sex Slavery in Some Postcolonial African Literature". (2019) The study explores the linguistic representation of sex trafficking victims in novels like *Beyond the Horizon*, *Trafficked*, and *Sarah House*. It uses systemic linguistic orientation and phenomenistic construal to understand their emotions and attitudes. He argues that language serves as a bridge, allowing readers to witness their experiences and expose the injustices they have suffered.

Child Trafficking within the Literary Context

This section addresses the studies done on literary works that depict the suffering of children who are victims of child trafficking. This form of trafficking is sadly widespread worldwide. It is among the most devastating forms of human trafficking that deprives victims of living their childhood in a normal, healthy way instead they are victimized and have to do things that they cannot even comprehend. Unfortunately, traffickers don't recognize this right, instead they see children as an easy prey that can make them fortunes. Just like sex trafficking, child trafficking is also reflected in literature worldwide while being more common in third world poor countries and specifically African countries. This appalling crime has led many writers to write about this issue to fight back and stop this heinous crime against humanity. It, in turn, led scholars to shed the light on this issue in a try to raise awareness and find solutions to stop it. For instance, in her book review "Book Review of *The Road of Lost Innocence: The True Story of a Cambodian*

Heroine by Somaly Mam" (2020) U. H. Ruhina Jesmin The novel follows Mam, a protagonist who has endured forced labor, trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced marriage throughout her life. She was left by her parents as a child, sold to a man who forced her into domestic work and sexual abuse, and eventually married a soldier. The novel highlights the intersection of human rights violations, the state-approved sex industry, and political power dynamics, particularly in relation to the healthcare of sex slaves.

In a study entitled "A Quest for The Self: Conceptual Metaphor in *Slave*" (2019) Amal Ahmed Eassa Gami analyzes the novel *Slave* (2003), focusing on conceptual metaphors of freedom and slavery. She examines Mende Nazer's use of metaphors to compare slavery to freedom, the concept of social death, and autobiographical memory in slave narratives. The study finds that journeys are used to conceptualize both freedom and slavery, with Mende's freedom journey being limited to her imagination.

As mentioned earlier, child trafficking is a crime against humanity which violates human rights worldwide. In this vein, Rizqikah, Moelier and Asyrafunnisa study this issue from human rights and sociological perspectives in their paper "Human Rights in The Novel *Half The Sky* By Wudunn And Kristof (Sociological Study)" (2022). The study explores the social contexts influencing and violating human rights in the novel, using a sociological analysis and descriptive qualitative research methodology, they argue that Wudunn and Kristof accurately depicted the various human rights as well as the societal circumstances that influence such transgressions.

Similarly, Vera Mackie in her article "The cultural dimensions of human rights advocacy in the Asian region" (2010) focuses on the human rights aspect of the novel *Half the Sky* (2009). She notes that the novel's readers are privileged first world audience, viewing human

rights violations as offshore, in exotic third-world locations. Concerns are raised about the verbal and visual representations used, urging caution in conveying messages and encouraging advocacy. She comes with the conclusion that a comprehensive understanding of verbal and visual texts is needed, considering perspectives from activists, scholars, bureaucrats, journalists, and stakeholders.

Child Trafficking which is highlighted in Wambui Otieno's novel *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life history* shows how Kenya's sociopolitical past influenced her life story. This novel is studied by Folasade Hunsu in "Engendering an Alternative Approach to Otherness in African Women's Autobiography" (2013) which proposes another approach of reading otherness in African women's autobiographical novels. It looks at how celebrated her otherness. It comes to the conclusion that her autobiography is a prime example of how distinctive the female subject-narrator is within the African communal ethos.

Forced Labor within the Literary Context

The third section addresses studies done on forced labor within the literary context. It provides a review of the past studies that tackle the issue of modern-day slavery or as some scholars refer to it as "neo-slavery". Although slavery is abolished long ago, it is still practiced and perpetrated by people all around the world. It is a crime that still exists not only in poor third world countries, but even in the most developed countries, which has led many authors to write about this issue globally. Therefore, this section is dedicated to survey the past written literature that studies forced labor within the literary context.

Forced labor and slavery are still prominent during the 21st Century being perpetrated by criminals all around the globe even in the most advanced prosperous nations. Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter in their book *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today* (2010) point out that as a matter of fact that human trafficking

and slavery is the third largest criminal enterprise. It not only exists in the world of today, rather it is flourishing. They argue that slavery is alive in the United States, thriving and being practiced all over the country (Bales and Soodalter, 2010, p.3). Their book gives a detailed account on the state of modern-day slavery in the United States.

As an example, for the above-mentioned point, Out and Onyemaechi in their article "Racial Identity and Modern Day Slavery in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, Joe Turner's *Come and Gone*, and Ma Rainey's *Black Bottom*" (2015) point out that modern-day slavery continues to be practiced, despite its abolishment in 1865. Discrimination based on race disproportionately affects African Americans, hindering economic independence, participation in the free market economy, and access to opportunities for education and political advancement. Contemporary plays like *Gem of the Ocean*, *Come and Gone* and *Black Bottom* depict African American exclusion and discrimination as a historical continuation of slavery. New Historicism theory suggests racial discrimination, neglect, and opportunity denial contribute to slavery's perpetuation.

Fouad Mami in his study "Modern-Day Slavery in Selected Short Fiction by Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" (2017) sheds the light on the issue of slavery in contemporary Nigeria by analyzing two fiction works: *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and *News from Home* (2010). The novels explore the legacy of slavery in modern society, highlighting the fascination of contemporary slavery dramas over transatlantic slavery. Young Nigerians are increasingly risking their lives outside their country due to worsening living conditions and economic pressures. The novelists use striking imagery to persuade readers that daily humiliations in Nigeria drive them into a slave-like experience in the United States. Mami concludes that slavery escapes conventional categories that confine it in place and time, and is an example for any

endeavor that aims to degrade human existence. Therefore, it is humanity's responsibility to support those working to end slavery as a practice and, more significantly, as a way of being and thinking.

A study done by Abigail Ward entitled "Servitude and Slave Narratives" (2016) investigates the slave narratives in Mende Nazer's *Slave* and Zadie Smith's *The Embassy of Cambodia*. Throughout her analysis of the main characters of the novels, she analyzes the narratives of slavery that are still being used by people even though slavery is presumably abolished. She mentions the stories of these characters and how they have been stigmatized, enslaved and demonized in their societies. She concludes that not only are the new slaves a "ghost population" who are not seen by society at large, or are only partially seen, but the enslaved and former slaves also struggle to either survive as "non-person" or deal with past traumas that haunt them. These struggles add to the spectrality of the new slaves.

The issue of forced labor, a form of human trafficking, is studied in Durga Lal's "Delineation of Slavery in Selected Literature of Nepal" (2023). He mentions that slavery was abolished in Nepal in 1981 but it was a real challenge to end it practically. He analyzes Nepali literary works that depict the practices of Kamaiya and Kamlari, which are forms of bonded labor that were very famous in Nepal. The study concludes that slavery in Nepal is still far from being abolished and the practices of Kamaiya and Kamlari are still being perpetrated as it was reflected in the characters that the study analyzed.

Marijana Mikić's "Race, Trauma, and the Emotional Legacies of Slavery in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*" (2023), argues that Gyasi's novel explores the impact of forced labor and slavery on characters, particularly people of color, across multiple generations. The narrative, set in Ghana in the 18th century, focuses on the emotional experiences of Black characters and the lasting trauma and resilience of descendants

of Africans who were once slaves. Gyasi encourages readers to question narratives of racial progress and the persistent presence of trauma and injustice.

In the same vein, in their article "Investigating Hybridity in "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" (2022) Sarah Shamshad and Asad Ali Hashmi concentrate on analyzing the issue of migration and how it effects the main character in the novel using the concept of hybridity within the postcolonial literary theory. Racism, she argues, originated from the feeling of dejection of being despised by the host society. Ifemelu experienced a mental issue as a result of feeling alone in a foreign land and not knowing who she was, demonstrating how living in two different cultures pushed her to the brink of uncertainty and identity crisis. She was therefore compelled to abandon her own identity in order to replicate American society, which made her ambiguous both to the Americans and to herself.

Conclusion

This current review has surveyed the previously written literature about human trafficking within the literary context. Throughout the surveyed scholarly studies, it is proven that the three main forms of human trafficking, namely sex trafficking, child trafficking and forced labor, still constitutes a threat to the social fabric of the society. This review shows that studies approaching the human trafficking focus primarily on the traumatic experiences of the trafficked people as well as the social, economic, and political factors that cause this heinous phenomenon. In addition, these studies revolve around the narratives employed by traffickers to maintain this non-human-crime. Also, the investigation of these human trafficking narratives shapes the majority of written articles. Therefore, the review comes up with the conclusion that exploring the anti-narratives of human trafficking within the literary context is not done yet in the existing literature, which entails more

investigation.

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