

Representations of Sex Slavery as Psychosocial Violence in Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*

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Abstract

*Sexual slavery, an off shoot of human trafficking, has often been seen as an off shore 'business' where women are trafficked abroad for prostitution, mostly propelled by monetary gains. Extant work on the subject has largely tended to see it as a phenomenon that happens largely outside the shores of Nigeria. However, through literary imagination, this despicable act, and its attendant violence, has been exposed and decried in the shores of Nigeria, and the Niger Delta area. Violence against women has often been viewed from the prism of domestic physical abuse, undermining the psychic wounds suffered by abused women in sex slavery. Literary writers have themed their works with human trafficking and sex slavery such that there seem to be few, if not scant attention paid to the attendant physical and emotional violence attendant to the anomaly. The matter has been domesticated in Nigeria, and the Niger Delta area. More so, as a crime perpetrated by women against themselves. This paper deploys the social trauma theory, to examine sex slavery as a tool of physical and emotional violence in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria as depicted in Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House* (2013), shortlisted for the 2012 Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) prize for literature, to examine the violence attendant to sex slavery in the Niger Delta area. Textual analysis, library work and participant interviews constitute the methodology for the work wherein it was found that violence and emotional stress have been deployed by women against themselves in the text to sustain sex slavery.*

Keywords: *Psychosocial, Sex slavery, Violence, Sarah House*

Introduction

False promises have always been baits deployed by human traffickers to lure their victims. They present hope of a better life, away from the squalor and poverty that besiege their victims in their prevailing conditions. Indigenous populations and those who live in abject poverty are typically economically marginalised: thus, most lack rights to some basic things, which make them vulnerable and easily amenable to quick responses to prospects of better life. Many times, people from these communities are offered false employment opportunities in major cities across the world (Collier, 2023).

Women and girls get promises of being offered jobs as nannies, waitresses, models, dancers among others. These promises, in the midst of excruciating economic conditions, easily lure them into making themselves available to be trafficked. However, upon arrival to the promised destinations, these individuals are abused, threatened, and sold in the sex industry.

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria has early history of contact with the western world, especially Europe. As far back as the 15th century, people from Edo State in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, were involved in trade with Italy in art works (Sashaa, Bindel and Timothy. 2017)

Sasha et al noted that some women in the area, especially Edo State, were involved in legitimate businesses, travelling to Europe, particularly Italy, to buy goods to sell in Nigeria. Some of the women subsequently experienced failed businesses and stayed back in Italy to do menial jobs to survive.

The transition from legitimate trade to trafficking began as most of the women ventured into prostitution. They tended to find it rewarding, which was why they began bringing girls into the country for that same purpose. That marked the commencement of human movement that has grown into an organized crime. The pull factors reinforced by the economic success stories of those in Europe aided the willingness of girls to go to Europe for 'jobs'. They hardly knew that the jobs involve prostitution and sex slavery.

Human trafficking is a highly organised and widespread crime, impacting many people all across the world. As defined by modern slavery act of 2015, it is 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, receipt of persons using the following;

- Threat and force or other forms of coercion;
- Abduction
- Fraud and deception
- Abuse of power or abuse of vulnerability among others

It is the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve control over another person for the purpose of exploitation (www.ilo.org). Every year, many people from Nigeria, especially Edo State in the nation's south, which has become one of Africa's largest points for irregular human migration, are trafficked. The International Organisation for Migration (IMO) estimates that 91

percent victims trafficked from Nigeria are women, and their traffickers have sexually exploited more than half of them (Salaudeen, 2020).

The modern slavery act has been replicated in many countries of the world with minor amendments to suit the environment of operation. 167 countries, including Nigeria, have some form of Modern Slavery act, but the existence of these laws has not prevented the perpetration of the criminal act(www.legislation.gov.uk). This act has largely been seen as an international, cross border crime.

Osita Agbu (2003) was emphatic when he noted that;

Human Trafficking tends to be systemic in its occurrence especially that its span increase as the globalisation process intensifies.... Today contemporary human trafficking is an organised business hustle as the transatlantic slave trade was with various linkages Spread around the globe. (2003.1)

Human trafficking has thus been globalised in the mode of transatlantic slave trade. Slave Trade was abolished in the United States of America 1807. In that year the U.S. Congress passed an act to “prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States...from any foreign kingdom, place, or country (Saeed, 2005).

In spite of this abolition, human trafficking has long resurfaced, and has become organised, in spite of laws against it. It does not wear the toga of force at inception. The victims are pulled by economic factors into agreeing to relocate for greener pastures. Things take a different turn when the victims, in this case girls, are forced to engage in prostitution, to offset the expenditure incurred in moving them to the new place. Such repayments come with profits for those who started the process.

As a mimetic art, literary writers have themed their works with human trafficking, resulting in forced prostitution and its negative effects. Chika Unigwe’s *on Black Sister’s Street* (2009), which won the coveted Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNLG) prize for literature in 2012, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi’s *Eyo* (2009), Ifeoma Chinwe Uba’s *Merchants of Flesh* (2009) are some of the literary offerings that have been themed with

sex slavery and human trafficking. Many of these writers looked at the human trafficking and sex slavery as an international crime.

But the crime has been domesticated, an angle that has not sufficiently got the attention of writers and researchers. This paper has identified the research gap in the area of domestication of human trafficking and sex slavery in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, and the use of violence in its perpetration. The paper, therefore, seeks to show that the crime has been domesticated as shown in Ifeanyi Ajegbo's novel, and that violence is a means of its enactment.

Why sexual slavery?

Perpetrators of this sex slavery do it for financial gain. Many victims live in fear of their exploiters and would never speak up about what they are enduring. The silence is accentuated by the threat of physical harm, and even death. The victims are thus coerced into silence in the face of physical and emotional extortion to the enrichment of those who lured them into such modern-day slavery.

Physical and emotional violence thus become veritable instruments to keep the victims tied to the apron strings of their masters. They are brutalised, dehumanised, emotionally and physically traumatised. Such emotional trauma has physical consequences, such that the victims suffer double jeopardy.

In the literary space some Nigerian writers have themed their writings on human trafficking and sex slavery. Using Chike Unigwe's novel, *On Black Sisters Street* and Bisi Ojedinran's *A Daughter for Sale*, both Nigerian born authors, Amen Egbe (2014) examined Sex Trafficking Industry, a major off-shoot of human trafficking, as having the characteristics of a normal workplace albeit with more stringent regulations from the industry players. The Woman is a key employer in this industry and the article expounded sex slavery as a major exploitive act against women.

Sex slavery is a condition in which one human being is owned by another and forced or otherwise coerced into working in a sex trade. Activities associated with sex slavery include prostitution, pornography, slavery, child sex rings, sex tourism, and such occupations as nude dancing and modelling (Egbe, 2014).

Egbe did not look at the menace as a largely off shore crime. Sex trafficking involves procurement and transport of victims while sex slavery can involve men, most victims are women. According to European Union Agency for Asylum, among the various forms of sex slavery, forced prostitution is noted to be the most common. (www.euaa.europa.eu)

Chika Unigwe, in her novel, *on black sister's street*, tells the haunting story of four women who have left Africa, their homeland, to pursue greener pastures in Europe, but were thrown together by misfortune that would change their lives. Each night, Sis, Ame, Efe and Joyce stand in the windows of Antwerp's red-light district, promising to make the sexual desires of men come true. Pledged to the fierce Madam and a mysterious pimp named Dele, the girls share an apartment.

They keep their heads down, knowing that any step out of line could cost them a week's wages. They open their bodies to strangers but their heads to no one, each focused on earning enough to set herself free, to send money home or save up for her own future. The story largely illuminates the dream of seeking green pastures in the western world, and the illusion of that search as seen through the eyes of African young women. It is largely the story of young women involved in sex slavery, and the attendant social and psychological trauma.

Ekanem Ipkeme's *Hurting in the inside* (2006), tells the story of a girl, Abasinawa, who was continuously sexually abused by her uncle, Oku, for two years. she kept it as a closely guarded secret for fear of being killed by the predator uncle who had kept that threat looming. This example is sexual abuse in contrast to the previous example where the girls seem to have offered themselves. Both instances are sustained by force, deceit and psychological trauma. In both cases fear became a strong weapon in keeping the victims in check.

These two literary works exemplify novels that have been themed with sex slavery and psychosocial violence against women. While Unigwe's work confirms the assertion by Osita Agbu (2003) and Amen Egbe (2014) that sex slavery and its attendant negative vices are largely cross border crimes, *Hurting on the inside* portrays the menace as domestic malfeasance.

In the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, which comprise the delta of the Niger River, sitting directly on the Gulf of the Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria (Umoh, Unyime, et al (2022), consisting the Nigerian states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Delta, and Akwa Ibom, the menace of sex slavery has also been represented in literature, exemplified in Bisi Ojedian's *A Daughter For*

Sale (2006), among others. The menace has largely been seen as cross border issue or domestic abuse.

Domestication of sex slavery

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria has early history of contact with the western world, especially Europe. As far back as the 15th century, people from Edo State in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, were involved in trade with Italy in art works (Sashaa et al 2017)

Sasha et al noted that some women in the area, especially Edo State, were involved in legitimate businesses, travelling to Europe, particularly Italy, to buy goods to sell in Nigeria. Some of the women subsequently experienced failed businesses and stayed back in Italy to do menial jobs to survive. The transition from legitimate trade to trafficking began as most of the women ventured into prostitution. They tended to find it rewarding, which was why they began bringing girls into the country for that same purpose. The pull factors reinforced by the economic success stories of those in Europe aided the willingness of girls to go to Europe for ‘jobs’.

They hardly knew that the jobs involve prostitution and sex slavery. According to McMahon (2023), sexual slavery is a form of slavery that includes forced sexual activity. Some sex slaves are kept in bondage specifically for sexual use. Sex slaves are subjected to both sexual assault and rape by their captors, as well as other people. Like other forms of slavery, sexual slavery is illegal and it is considered a significant human rights abuse

The act is also described as the attachment of any ownership right over one or more people with the intent of coercing or otherwise forcing them to engage in sexual activities. This crime, in relation to Nigeria, has largely been perceived as a cross border crime. Writers have themed their works with the menace as exemplified in some of the works listed earlier.

Little seem to have been done in the literary circle in Nigeria to show that sex slavery, and the attendant physical and emotional violence, has been domesticated in the shores of Nigeria, and in specific terms, the Niger Delta area. One literary work that has focused on the menace of sex slavery locally, with virtually the same method as the cross-border practice is Ifeanyi Ajaegbo’s, *Sarah House* (2013).

The novel, shortlisted for the 2012 Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) prize for fiction, is a clear pointer that the ‘business’ has been domesticated in the Niger Delta. It has developed into an illegal enterprise of its own, with the attendant violence and psychosocial misdemeanours. The novelist tells a story of trafficking from the hinterland, in this instance Opobo in Rivers State, to Port Harcourt. Deception, one of the characteristics of the trade, is deployed, just the same way girls are deceived into going across the borders, especially Europe, in pursuit of non-existent El Dorado.

The research question here would be this: are there social and psychological violence as enhanced by sex slavery in *Sarah House*? The attendant violence, deception and force constitute the instruments of sex slavery deployed to perpetuate the menace in the story in much the same way it operates in instances where the victims were trafficked across the shores of Nigeria. This paper seeks to show that emotion and physical violence aided sex slavery in *Sarah House*. Like their colleagues who are trafficked across the borders, victims of internal trafficking are visited with violence and trauma.

Theoretical framework

Trauma theory is an active, interdisciplinary western field of study which has been developed since the 1980s through the mutual exchange of ideas and concepts in the humanities and psychology. The incorporation of trauma theory into exploring literary studies is realized in relation to the influence of psychoanalysis; it has also helped in explaining or exploring the complexities of the relationships during violence or violent acts. Hence sex slavery and human trafficking, executed through violent acts, fit into this category. The term, “trauma theory” was first documented and explained in Cathy Caruth’s (1996) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The theory originates from the exposition and explanation of Sigmund Freud on traumatic experiences.

In essence, Freud’s concept of “traumatic neurosis,” is what the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 accepted as “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD), an idea important in defining the trauma theory. Cathy Caruth (1995:3-5) defines “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the

event. The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”.

Trauma theory has been linked to multiple disciplines and fields of study ranging from literature, history, and psychoanalysis to cultural studies, and others. Works by some writers have concentrated on the representation of trauma through literature, film, and photography. (Caruth (1996), Maryanne (1997)). Caruth’s text conceives the idea of “belatedness” at the centre of the theory of trauma, arguing that a traumatic event is accessible only in its return. Felman and Laub, LaCapra, and Leys have also engaged with both theoretical and clinical aspects of psychoanalysis and how they inform our contemporary understanding of individual and collective psychic wounds in order to fully explore the theory of trauma.

Felman (2002) attributes the contemporary interest in theorizing about trauma to “three interrelated twentieth-century occurrences” namely; the discovery of psychoanalysis, the discovery of trauma as a new conceptual centre, an essential dimension of human and historical experience, and a new type of understanding of historical causality and of historic temporality.

According to him, a traumatic experience occurs too immediately for the consciousness to record, but its mental or unconscious images (memory) come back to the victim belatedly and repeatedly when such action repeats itself. Therefore, memory helps the victim to recall his or her experiences in the forms of dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations etc. Psychoanalysis is an extension of trauma theory. Felman explains that literature appreciates, and in literature traumatic experiences remain open with all its horror, nightmares, and silence.

However, Contemporary literary trauma theory further asserts that trauma creates a state of terror excited by sudden appearance of danger which divides or destroys identity. This work aligns with the position that Trauma is an emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates a given society.

The term, “trauma novel” refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on an individual based on recollected memory. (Odinye, 2018). One characteristic of the trauma novel is the sudden transformation of the self (personality) ignited by an external factor such as

terrifying experience that exposes previous recollected experiences which inform the new perceptions of the self and the society. Therefore, the experience that elicits an extreme response from the protagonist in a literary work is not necessarily bound to a collective human or natural disaster such as war.

The traumatic experience can include, for example, an intimate personal experience of female sexual violence, as found in the selected text, *Sarah House*. The major trauma theory employed in a given literary piece depends on the nature of the experience which is used to assert the position that traumatic experience produces a “temporal gap” and dissolution of the self. For example, Couthe (1996:15) writes: “Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of “normal conception”.

However, trauma differs between individuals, according to their experiences. Memories associated with trauma are implicit, pre-verbal and cannot be recalled, but can be triggered by stimuli from the environment. Many contemporary African literary scholars such as Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chika Unigwe, Ifeanyi Ajege among others, have depicted the ugly and bizarre experiences of girls and women who have been trafficked in order to expose its negative consequences on the female gender, their growth, and development as individuals in different societies. The difference in Ajege’s *Sarah House* is the domestication of the trafficking and sex slavery even within the confines of a part of Nigeria.

Representations of Violence in *Sarah House*

Ifeanyi Ajege, describes himself in the blurb of the novel, as a communications practitioner and development consultant who lives and works in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. He is an award-winning author, having won the 2005 African Region Prize for the Commonwealth Short story Competition. His debut novel, *Sarah House* (2013) which has been purposively selected for this paper, made the short list of 2012 Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) prize for literature.

It is the poignant writing of this new talent who researched the dark recesses of human trafficking and sex slavery, operating with the apparent connivance of law enforcement agencies, or

operators whose mode of operation seem to go beyond the ambit of the law. Nita, the narrator, tells her harrowing story in the first-person narrative mode. From the relatively rural community of Opobo, in Rivers State, Nigeria, she is taken to Port Harcourt: from a serene, easy rural life to the bustling and racy lifestyle of the city.

She is totally unprepared for the new way of life which her so-called lover, a human trafficker who masked his evil intent by professing love to an innocent village girl who may, indeed, be hearing such sweet words with heightened hope. Slim, as the evil lover is known, is an agent of a human trafficking syndicate. She comes to the city to 'work' as a whore, to her chagrin and consternation. Attempts to get herself out of the quagmire results in dangerous and devastating consequences. The 12-Chapter novel tells the disturbing story of a woman's world of human trafficking and prostitution.

Writing on the blurb of the novel, Chika Unigwe notes that 'Ajaegbo tackles a very serious, contemporary problem with empathy, a lightness of touch that ensures that a reader is never left completely overwhelmed.' This appears so because the traumatic story ends with a certainty that the law is closing in on the perpetrators. There is also the distressing story of organ harvesting as another evil that thrives in Sarah House, a high-class brothel which also houses an orphanage, a seeming charity that qualifies as a malevolent one: raw material for organ harvesting.

Although *Sarah House* is largely themed with sex slavery as a sad occurrence in the shores of Nigeria, in this case, the Niger Delta area, against the general assumption that the menace is a cross country crime, there is still a link to the external root of the hazard. Sarah House, as a whore house, was set up by a woman deported from Italy, who is the 'Madam' of that place. In the sex trafficking business, madam is usually an older woman who manages a brothel, escort service or other prostitution establishment. She may work alone or in collaboration with other traffickers. (Smith, 2023).

No one ever knew the real name of the madam in *Sarah House*. She was formerly trafficked from Benin, Nigeria, with the deceptive news that she was in pursuit of greener pasture. She ran into trouble with her captors and was deported. At the Airport in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, her beauty caught the eyes of a big wig in the society, who lives in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, but comes to Port Harcourt for regular rendezvous.

He helped Madam establish the whore house, had an affair with her, before leaving her for younger girls. He still does ‘business’ with her, and satisfies his sexual desires with girls in Sarah House, and Nita became his chosen whore, who he would fly to Abuja, the Nation’s capital, for escapades.

The point is that domestication of sex slavery in *Sarah House* is a crime committed by women against themselves. According to Smith (2023) and Egbe (2014) women who have once been trafficked play roles in trafficking others. In the case of Sarah House, the madam would buy girls lured from other places in Rivers State to Port Harcourt for greener pastures. Amazingly, Sarah House is named after a close friend of the Madam’s who lost her life in Italy as a result of the violence and rough life attendant to sex slavery. On return to Nigeria, she would rather make a living with the ‘business’, than advocate for the end of a nefarious act which once gave her the short end of the stick.

Psychological and social violence as instruments of sex slavery

Victims of the sex slavery are abused physically and psychologically (Sasha et.al, 2017). In the novel *Nita*, short for Juanita, the narrator, and the other girls go through trauma as a result of their experience. When Nita refused to ‘work’ for Slim, the supposed lover who lured her to Port Harcourt for greener pastures, he noted that Nita was not used to strangers. In order to straighten that seeming clog in the wheel of progress, Slim arranged for a stranger to beat and rape her. She described her horror in her narrative:

‘I smelt his breadth, a mixture of *Kai Kai the* local gin and Marijuana. There were several other smells I could not name... he lowered his hand a little to let air trickle into my inflamed nostrils, but kept his vice-fingers clamped over my mouth. I stopped struggling because he seemed to enjoy it. It seemed to make him more aggressive. He pulled me against himself again. This time I felt his turgid penis against my abdomen. I looked up into his eyes begging him as my shirt came off his hands. His hands slid down the button of my jeans...straddling my knees, he forced my legs apart and lowered himself on me. I screamed again as the darkness and light at the same time (Ajegbo: p66-67)

Physical and emotional pain represents violence in the novel, such that Nita was traumatised by the pain of rape orchestrated by a man who claimed to love her, but brought pain and sex slavery to replace a promised better life in the city. Sarah House was ruled by violence to the point that such reality hung in the air. That certainty hit Nita shortly after she came into the house. Her movement from Opobo is a result of deception and kidnap by Slim. She was sold like a slave to Sarah House where no less than six other girls were on 'duty'. On her second day as a captive, it became evident that violence hung in the air:

Everything I have seen of life in this place suggests it was ruled by violence, and by men who caused pain without much thought. The girls told me that Fatty and Slim sometimes hit them, or sent people to beat them... (p 24) Violence was the name of the game in that sex slave camp. Physical assault precedes the rape organised by Slim, the man who lured Nita to Port Harcourt. The shock of a friend-turned-foe under the prevalent circumstance can ignite psychological pain. Even conversations exuded violence:

Slim exploded. He shoved me away with so much force that I reeled back and collapsed on the bed... I flinched at the violence in his tone. I was starting to realize that there was little difference between mental and physical blows. They both hurt. Slim's left hand exploded against the right side of my face. The blow threw me against the wall again, more forcefully this time. Pain raced across my shoulder and down the centre of my back. I would never have believed that someone like Slim if he had not struck me (pp 28-29)

Damage was done to the trafficked girls' psyche, given the level of deception and manipulation brought to bear in luring them to the Brothel, which represents a slave camp. Nita had the mental picture of Slim, who took her to the river side in Opobo for romantic memories, but the transformation to red-eyed violent master made the picture die a painful death in her soul.

It was painful because she loved a lie, a figment of someone's imagination created to lure her from the village to the city. The irony of regular interface with a man whose profession of love was a decoy to a harrowing lifestyle, where she becomes a prostitute for proceeds that fatten his pocket, and turns her heightened hope into ashes in the mouth cannot but damage her psyche.

The real-life story of Jane, rescued from sex slavery in Libya, as against Italy where she was promised a job, lends credence to the reality of the thematic concern of *Sarah House*, outside the confines of fiction. Jane lamented her tormenting experience in the hands of a trafficker who deceived her to leave Nigeria to travel to Italy for pecuniary reasons. The destination changed only after she had consented to move for greener pastures. They took me and other girls from Lagos to Agbor in Delta State, and from there to Niger Republic, and through the Sahara Desert we moved to Libya. We spent two months in the Desert. It was Italy they said I would go to work. The trafficker forced us into prostitution and it was a very bad experience. I was a virgin but my trafficker raped me and forced me to carry out an abortion. After paying thousands of dollars to my trafficker from the proceeds of prostitution to buy my freedom, he sold me to another person to continue another round of exploitation (Bello, 2023). That true life story bears a resemblance to Nita's in *Sarah House* given that Jane's trafficker raped her and ultimately sold her to another person to continue the sexual exploitation.

The economic well-being of the trafficker come from the degradation and subjugation to the most humiliating acts known to man. This often comes with a lot of pain and trauma. Force was applied to get the girls to 'work', the euphemism for prostitution. In one instance, Tega, one of the girls, was physically assaulted. Fatty, one of the minders of the girls, resorted to assault to get the girl to 'work':

His fingers dug deeper into the skin around her neck, making her wince
in pain. Fatty loosened the grip so she could turn her head...there was
pure terror in her eyes. There was also a plea she could not put into words
still holding her by the neck, Fatty shoved Tega towards the door and
commanded her to get set for work (Ajaegbo, 2013: 71)

Nita describes their situation as similar to animals being looked over before a buyer made an offer, admitting that the girls in *Sarah House* shared 'collective trauma'. It was a life of slavery, depravity and pain. Madam was noted to have many militia friends that anyone who ran away from *Sarah House* never lived long enough to tell the story. Threat to life was the albatross that

loomed on the head of any girl who dared to free herself from that shackle of slavery. There was also the sheer torment of girls dancing naked in night clubs against their will. Nita put it thus:

It was more that I could accept as 'work', in privacy. In the private of a room, to be fondled and caressed in public. To be fondled and caressed by more than fifty men. That was a nightmare...sleeping with a mugu for money was quite different from stripping to the skin before a crowd and having anyone in that crowd touch you when and where they felt like. The most devastating aspect of that experience was that you had no control of what happened. The patrons could do anything they wanted. The girls could sleep
With all the men in that hall. (p. 156)

The foregoing could amount to emotional violence. The irony of smiling to strangers who could touch your private parts while you feigned a smile that masked deep seated anger was tormenting emotionally. Representations of violence in *Sarah House* are psychic and physical. Violence represents a vital instrument for the actualisation of sex slavery in *Sarah House*. one of the girls, Tega, paid the supreme price for daring to resist the debasement that came with the sex slavery, but Nita came out with her life, and was emboldened to seek to expose the syndicate to waiting hands of the law.

Conclusion

The horror of sex slavery is aided by violence it has shed the toga of a cross border crime as shown in *Sarah House*. Girls from cash- strapped families are lured with false promises of better life in cosmopolitan cities only to be visited with unimaginable violence and depravity. The crime, rather than abate, has also assumed the status of well organised underworld business, which thrives on deception and violence. The case of the selected text exemplifies traumatic experience meted out to women whose helplessness is accentuated by forced silence. Nita and her colleagues are dehumanized, brutalised and held down with threats and violence. Her closing comment as

she walked away from Sarah House is instructive, and gives hope that victims can call the bluff of their captors:

I would leave here and live out my life as well as I could.

the night swallowed me, each stride putting more distance

between me and Sarah House, between me and the

nightmare it represented (Ajaegbo, 2013:250)

This paper has shown the representations of violence as the major ingredient of executing sex slavery in a society where prostitution has remained inscrutable. The term ‘hook up’, as made popular in the social media, has become the new name of sex trade, where two consenting adults meet on the internet, agree on a fee and engage in sexual activity. The difference being that that it is consensual. Nita, Tega and other girls in *Sarah House* came by deception, and sustained in the trade with force and violence. The paper adds to the awareness on the nefarious activity, and the need for the law to close in on the local syndicates, and free innocent girls from the violence and emotional torture consequent upon the menace. The law enforcement agents must close in on this crime otherwise innocent girls will continue to suffer violence and depravity in the hands of syndicates and their collaborators.

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