

## BRUISED BODIES, TRAUMA AND RESISTANCE IN AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO'S *TRAFFICKED* AND CHRIS ABANI'S *BECOMING ABIGAIL*

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### Abstract

*In recent years, young girls in sub-Saharan Africa have become increasingly endangered due to human trafficking. They are not only subjected to modern slavery and forced prostitution, but their transported bodies are also bruised and traumatized in Europe. These harrowing experiences are captured in African diasporic narratives. This essay therefore examines the bruised bodies of trafficked girls, their traumatic experiences, and their resistance in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's Trafficked and Chris Abani's Becoming Abigail. Through coerced prostitution, these girls are reduced to mere commodities, deceived with false job opportunities, and forced into selling their bodies in Europe. However, the essay demonstrates that, despite the horrific constraints of racial discrimination, dehumanization, and commodification, the writers deploy different strategies of resistance to liberate their female protagonists. In their struggle for survival, some characters employ subtle tools of resistance, such as sisterhood and the infliction of injury on their oppressors, while others adopt more combative strategies, including killing their oppressors. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology and draws on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as its theoretical framework. This choice is based on the premise that the issue under investigation involves multidimensional questions of identity formation, characterization, and traumatic disorder. The essay concludes that although the combative strategy of inflicting physical injury or killing oppressors may be condemned as extreme, it reflects Adimora-Ezeigbo's and Abani's stylistic commitment to denouncing the continued bruising and traumatization of the female body, whether on African soil or abroad.*

**Key Words:** Bruised Bodies, Trauma, Resistance, Trafficking, dehumanisation

### Introduction

Several studies in migration reveal that while the challenge of trafficking for modern slavery manifests actively in every corner of the world, girls of Sub-Saharan African origins are more susceptible to human trafficking. This is so because a large number of them are influenced with push factors of unemployment, lack of parental care, poor leadership, conflict and war. These issues became the major concern of some African diaspora writers as a sign of a gradual shift in migratory characterisation of male characters to female characters. This shift in migratory narrative has become a topical theme since women from proven facts are vulnerable to traffickers than their male counterparts. This is so, because traffickers find the African women's bodies as objectified goods for financial gains when shipped abroad. Therefore, most African diaspora writers focus on the presentation of the female character than the male folks in their narratives. This is why Stephen Castles and Mark Miller opine that "one of the most distinctive characteristics of this era of migratory literature is the *feminization of migration*" - a verifiable trend affirmed by the United Nations in 2006 (cited in Pellicer-Ortin and Tofantsuk 4), as the girl-child has assumed an important part in migratory literature, not only with the litanies of African female diaspora writers but also, available evidences of deliberate use of female characters as protagonists. Supporting the feminisation of migratory narratives in creative output where women bodies are seen as source of income, Katherine Donato and Donna Gabacia explain that "though in the earlier narrative outputs by African diaspora, most job-seeker migrants and conflict-related mobility were men influenced but with the advent of the new woman in 1980s, the girl-child has assumed a significant duty in seeking for jobs abroad as a means of liberating their families from poverty" (23).

Also, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that the interest of gender migratory studies has received a wider creative narrative at the dawn of the new millennium since the quota of African female migrants travelling to the West and U.S for household chores have substantially doubled. Thus, the new female character in her migratory experience has evolved into an important figure of global market forces, ruled by demand and supply. But unfortunately in this precarious state, becomes victim of underground cartel of traffickers because her body is seen as source of income for traffickers and pimps. Confirming this bitter experience of the female migrant, the United Nations estimates that "as of 2021, 49% of all global emigrants both local and international migration are the girl-child, and the number of women migrating to developed countries has reached 51% in recent times" (2023, III). So, Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* depict how push and pull factors seem to induce the idea of Africans migrating abroad.

Interestingly, highly innovative in both texts is the feminisation of the protagonists where their bodies are seen as commodity, and when shipped abroad can solve economic problems of poverty and improve one's

poor status in Africa. In both texts, the authors fictionally create their female protagonists from a disadvantaged economic position and migrating abroad, becomes the only perceived solution to the family poverty status. This feminisation of poverty cleverly weaved by diaspora writers, pimps and traffickers is responsible for the spate of female migration of the major characters in African migratory narratives. In both texts, poverty is somewhat restricted to the girl-child only, and liberating the family from economic hardship, rests solely on the girl-child shoulder. The girl-child like the sacrificial “carrier” of libation and liberation in Wole Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed* is brainwashed by friends, traffickers and sometimes, effects of globalisation to believe that she has all it takes to solve her family economic problems. This feminisation of poverty tends to push the girl-child on the edge, and with the pull promise of pristine opportunities beyond the horizon as explained by Everest Lee’s theory of migration, she seeks to travel to Europe, U.S and Canada but finds out that she has being tricked and forced into prostitution. This is the predicaments of the female characters in Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* and Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*. In forced prostitution, the bodies of Nneoma, Efe, Alice, and Abigail were bruised, traumatized but they fight back vigorously to liberate themselves.

The study adopts Cathy Caruth’s Trauma Theory as theoretical framework. The theory was developed in 1996. The term “trauma theory” was first explained and documented by Cathy Caruth in her book entitled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* published in 1996. This theory is built on the works of Sigmund Freud about trauma issues in his two monograph piece entitled: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; and *Moses and Monotheism* where he explains the concept of “traumatic neurosis” as an overwhelming experience in the unconscious psyche, which is in the mind. However, there are different types of trauma theory, ranging from psychodynamic trauma theory (focuses on unconscious processes of childhood experiences in shaping responses); cognitive-behavioural trauma theory (emphasises interplay between thoughts and behaviours in the development of the individual); social learning trauma theory (traumatic behaviours that acquired via observation, imitation and reinforcement); neurobiological trauma theory (explores effect of trauma on brain development) and psychoanalytic trauma theory (builds on Sigmund Freud’s unclaimed experience). For this study, Caruth trauma theory built on Freud’s psychoanalytic is applied for the analysis of how bruised bodies of the prostitutes react to traumatic experiences in the selected texts. Caruth explores eventful experiences that are unrepresented, unsymbolised and unclaimed by the characters during moment of incident. For Caruth, “unclaimed” experiences are traumatic incidents which paralyses the individual so utterly that the victim mind is unable to process what just occurred. In some cases, such horrific incident strikes with visceral intense pressure which impedes the brain’s functionality, putting the person in a state of incomprehensible state.

Trauma theory according to Caruth is “a feeling that is witnessed as an ordinary recording of an experience, and sometimes a response delayed, to an overwhelming shock, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations or behaviors stemming from the event” (152). Due to the overwhelming shock, the brain falters to assimilate these experiences at the time of happening. For instance, if a recorder keeps running unplanned, it captures sounds that are sometimes, difficult for interpretation. This is why trauma is not just an experience, but a web of incidents which are not completely grasped by the individual at the time of their happening. Hence, it is a delayed painful process of recalling past event. Explaining further in an article entitled “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival”, Caruth contends that “trauma is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly and to be traumatized, is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (25). Here, recalling of past event becomes a weird literalness, as if the event has been planted on the brain without being fully analyzed.

In Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*, Nneoma and Efe, with other trafficked girls are reduced to objects that were deceived from African soil and sold as slaves in Europe. Here, as the title of the novel suggests, the girls were trafficked as they are cleverly deceived with fake job offers. For the pimps in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked*, female bodies are primarily source of income to them alone. They are slaves, just like commodities that can be sold at any time. Nneoma, recalling her horrific experience as a prey of human trafficking cartel that sees her as mere commodity that can fetch them money, she is deceived with fake appointment letter. With her N.C.E result that cannot fetch her employment in Nigeria, her predators deceive and objectify her as a commodity that can fetch them money as she is presented with:

pictures of schools where she will be teaching and give her appointment letter signed by people with English names... For the first time we hear we will get to Italy before travelling to Britain. That was my experience too: Efe said, you hardly know where you are until you get there. In Italy I discover I am trafficked. I have no say in the matter” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 127-128).

Like mere commodities without emotions and ownership over their bodies, these commercialized travelling bodies do not know their destinations neither have any say on how their bodies are used for profit-making. While Abigail in Chris Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* enjoys the freedom of not being sold as slave, Nneoma, Efe and other girls in *Trafficked* are sold as slaves immediately they arrive Italy as Nneoma dolently reveals “she keeps us as prisoner in her flat. Life is hell in Rome. ...I hate Madam Dollar. As soon we arrive, she sells my friend. I have not set eyes on her since” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 129). Interestingly, to further confirm the property status of Nneoma as a mere object that is shipped to Madam Dollar in Europe to make profit, the narrator informs us convivially that

“Madam Dollar says. You must pay me back every kobo I used to buy you” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 130). Yes, without mincing words, Nneoma is purchased as a commodity by Madam Dollar. Later on when there seems to be some rays of hope for these commodified and bruised bodies, Nneoma and two other girls are ignobly sold to Baron as mere commodities, as Nneoma recounts agonisingly thus “Then help seems to come in the person of a man called Baron. He takes me and two other girls to London and says he has rescued us. In actual fact, he has bought us from Madam Dollar, thus cancelling our debts” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 132).

It is sad that when Nneoma finally gets her freedom from Madam Dollar and feels happy for the first in Europe, but it turns out to a mirage as her ownership is only transferred to Baron. Baron has actually bought her as mere commodity for the purpose of financial gains in London. Baron therefore represents the face of the new trade who encourage the dehumanization of African female bodies for profiteering in Europe. What seems to be freedom becomes an extended bruising of Nneoma’s body. A vivid but telling evidence of how Adimora-Ezeigbo’s representation of African pimps perceiving the African female body as mere object that can be shipped abroad and sold is captured when the narrator excruciatingly informs us about Nneoma’s evaluation of Baron’s trafficking activities as thus:

She knew he was connected with the trafficking industry in Nigeria. She recalled the time he had left her in a brothel for a few days while he travelled to Nigeria and returned with two women, who later disappeared from the flat the following day. Nneoma suspected Baron sold them to pimps. He bought women and sold them regularly as if they were merchandise. (Adimora-Ezeigbo 135)

However, Nneoma’s terrifying experience above in the hands of her new owner is an example of psychological trauma that she will never forget since she was just a merchandise- an object brought by Baron to be further sold for profit-making. Her traumatic experience in London further captures the objectification of the African woman as a mere commodity that is utterly bruised, especially for trafficked girls that are engaged in sex work without authorisation as Nneoma recalls “Baron sends the other girls to brothels and keeps me in his flat. Instead of putting me on the street, he brings men to the flat. Baron is a sadist” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 132). This is why Nneoma wished never to see Baron again in her life time. As a purchased item, Baron keeps Nneoma at home as a sex toy for himself and her friends. And when the objectified Nneoma refuses to further bruise her body in an unspeakable manner like “when customers demand oral or anal sex and insist that they use condoms, Baron rapes and beats her” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 132). For Oyeh Otu, “the action of Baron is not surprising since in illegal prostitution, exploitation is an essential feature of human trafficking and so, it unavoidably entails atrocities in form of rape and sexual slavery” (12).

The underground human trafficking business in terms of mafia controlled economy involves any form of economic activities of informal, legitimate and illegitimate that are documented by the government. It should be pointed out that even in countries where prostitution is legalised, violence and exploitation rule supremely. No wonder Andrea Dworkin affirms that: “The cordial connection of sex work to rape is explicit and graphic: because any goods that can be stolen by traffickers, can be put up for sale. By extension, females that are trafficked by traffickers can be sold since underground codified laws see these stolen girls as sexual chattel” (239). Here, Baron plainly exemplifies the codification of the underground economy where its adherents not only traffic girls for profiteering, but violently molest and rape them at will. Traffickers like Baron turned lovingly souls into bruised ghosts that are so traumatized in life.

This commercialization and bruising of the girl-child for profiteering is equally experienced by Efe in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* as she informs us distressingly “Well, to cut a long story short, we were taken to Italy and ended in Palermo. It was terrible. I was sold to a woman called Madame Gold, a Nigerian. She was vicious. She used us shamelessly” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 99). Thus, these girls are not just deceived, coerced and involuntarily turned into money-making machines, but are subjected to shameless dehumanised status of commodities that are ingloriously merchandised as captives to traffickers who treated them as sex toys. Therefore, Adimora-Ezeigbo conveys the horrific bruised bodies of African emigrant women via sexual exploitation, their dehumanisation, humiliation, torture, nervous breakdown and depression. This is why Nneoma and Efe always thought of escaping, although their illegal immigrant status impedes its realisation.

While the pimp in *Becoming Abigail* uses push factors of unemployment, bad governance, deception, and orphan status to own the body of Abigail, Adimora-Ezeigbo introduces a more terrific dimension of “oath taking” as a means of controlling their captives as Nneoma reveals to Efe thus:

Everything was normal. They joke with us as if we were their sisters. I am so happy and thank my chi. I am already thinking of the money I’ll make in the United Kingdom. The only thing that worries me is that we have to take oath and they tell us the consequences will be severe if we disregard the terms of agreement, disobey them or cut links without settling our debts. Efe stopped her with a question. Where was the oath taken? In a shrine? No, they used the Bible and an image of arusi (127-128).

Efe- another female in the text, equally experienced the act of oath taking as she recounts “in my case, they took us to a shrine somewhere between Lagos and Ibadan (Adimora-Ezeigbo 128) and “before long, all the girls-ten of

us-were given a travel schedule. We took an oath to work for the agency until we paid our debts” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 98). Thus, the introduction of “oath-taking” becomes a manipulative tool employed by pimps in controlling these girls as their commodities which can fetch them money. The consequences of going against the oath aids further dehumanization of the trafficked girls’ bodies. To further gain control, upon their arrival, Efe and Nneoma soon find out that they have been deceived and sold to Madame Gold and Madam Dollar respectively. This is to show that trafficked girls have no control over their bodies as Nneoma narrates her grim experience to Efe thus: “I am completely devastated by the life I’m forced to live: hit the night street, waiting for customers, winter, spring, summer and autumn; come back at dawn, wash, eat and sleep till it all begins again at nightfall” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 129).

Also, to further demonstrate how pimps value the bodies of these trafficked girls as expensive commodity, Edimora-Ezeigbo creates a scenario that shows that, irrespective of Nneoma stubbornness of not always “cooperating with the customers, especially when they demand positions I find despicable or when they refuse to use condom... , Madam raves at me, and Captain beats me up, but he makes sure he does not disfigure me, for this will mean loss of revenue for Madam Dollar” (Edimora-Ezeigbo 129). Like commodity that must be handled fastidiously so as not to reduce its bargaining power, Madam does not want her cherished commodity-Nneoma to be disfigured. The irony here is telling since most traffickers focus on the physical appearance of their girls without paying attention to the trauma of their bruised souls.

As a habit practiced by most pimps, Nneoma like Abigail in Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* is presented just like a commodity for financial gains in the hands of Madam Dollar and Baron as she explains “they never gave me money. They always claimed that I would get no money until I paid my debt. Even when the customers gave me money, they took it from me” (133). This means that the body of the female African migrant is exclusively commercialized as a commodity for financial gains but at her lost. Here, the African girl-child body is used, bruised and dumped. Like objectified item, Nneoma is stringently watched by Baron as he had severally threatened that “he would cut off her legs and one of her breasts if she attempted to run away” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 167). Apart from the oath taking that hinders trafficked Nneoma to speak up, because grave consequences were marshalled out in the shrine, threat from Baron further reduce her to an object as “she didn’t think it was idle threat. She lived in fear of him” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 167).

However, as providence smiled at Nneoma, when she stole Baron’s pulse, and escaped but finds herself in the hand of another Nigerian man who still demands sex before helping her. Thus, the bruising and objectification of body as a merchandise is not over. When Nneoma was rescued by a Nigerian student, who begged Dimgba –another Nigerian who washes dishes in her hostel to help her, he further objectifies her as a piece of coal that can ignite a fire that should warm his body as he shabbily says “in this terrible British cold, we can warm each other” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 157). Even when Nneoma passionately pleaded that “please, give me time. I have been hurt badly in the past four years by men, I am prepared to pay for my board as soon as I find work” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 157), Dimgba is still bent on sleeping with her. Thus, Nneoma become a prototype of bruised body that is exploited by both African men and white folks.

However, Chris Abani portrayal of the African woman bruised body as a commodity for profiteering in *Becoming Abigail* is slightly different in terms of its destruction and dehumanization process. Notably, for differences in the presentation of forced prostitution, while most girls in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* endured certain levels of opprobrious pains, Abigail in *Becoming Abigail* experiences dehumanising status of lesser human and becomes a dog in the hands of Peter because her life is rigidly molded by paternalistic order. She lost her mother at childbirth, and at the age of ten years old, abused sexually by her cousin- Edwin, who warned her fiercely that “I will kill you if you tell anyone” (Abani 30). At twelve years, she is sexually abused by Peter-her future tormentor as the narrator informs us thus:

Peter wasn’t really her cousin, but was married to her cousin Mary. A few years before, at twelve, Abigail had been a bridesmaid at their wedding and Peter cornered her in the bathroom. She didn’t shrink away like other girls her age might have been surprised.... Surprised at her fearlessness he kissed her, his finger exploring her (Abani 61)

Yes, Peter has made incestuous sexual advances at Abigail at the age of twelve years which she resisted vehemently. However, this traumatic experience gives Abigail an opportunity to critically elevate Peter’s speech and therefore, she “didn’t buy Peter’s story about other girls he took to England, having run off with bad company, he had done something to them” (Abani 77). The terrifying experiences above of Edwin’s rape and Peter’s incestuous move reveal Abigail’s bruised body that is exploited even from cradle. And when Peter suggests to Abigail’s father taking her to London, she rejected bluntly. This is so, as seen in Abigail’s cognition of Peter’s trafficking deeds as she is always suspicious of, as the narrator reveals “She had been suspicious of him from the beginning. Not just because of what he had done to her when she was twelve, but because there was something about him that didn’t ring true” (Abani 77).

Sadly, years later when the father committed suicide, Abigail, as an orphan is illegally shipped by his brother in-law -Peter to England for the purpose of using her body in exchange for pounds. In England, Abigail experiences an abominable condition of a slave as she is chained in a doghouse, sexually violated by Peter. For

the despondent tale of Abigail, Abani objectifies her as a dog in order to show how female African migrants in Europe are poorly violated by people they trusted so much. For rejecting and biting the hand of one of the men Peter brings home to sleep with Abigail in exchange for money, she is treated like a dog as the narrator elaborately, but disturbingly informs us thus:

She only felt Peter grab her from behind, forcing her face into the pillow. He handcuffed her. Arms behind her back. Slipped a harness with a ball into her mouth and over her hand, chipping her teeth in the process. Grabbing her by her hair, he dragged her out of the bedroom. You want to bite like a dog? I'll treat you like a dog. The ground was cold and wet with dew and frost and Abigail's nightgown was streaked, dirty, by the time he stopped in front of the empty doghouse. He handcuffed her to the chain lying in front of it. This is what we do to dogs, he said. He spat at her and she flinched away. He turned to go, then stopped. Pulling his penis out, he peed all over her. Laughing as she thrashed about. That's my dirty dog, he said. Dirty dog (Abani 89)

And Abigail who has denied Peter of perceiving her body as source of income for profiteering is now reduced to a dog as she "drinks from the plate of rancid water. Bent forward like a dog. Arms behind her back. Kneeling. Into the mud. And the food- tossed out leftovers. To eat, without hands, she bit at the itches from blood vessels dying in the cold" (Abani 90). This decapitation of Abigail's body goes on for ten days as the narrator tells us:

And Peter came every day. Twice a day. At dawn. At dusk. To feed and water her. With rotting food. Rancid water. Sometimes his piss. By the tenth day she no longer cared. Couldn't tell the difference. She was a girl slowly becoming a dog. (90-91).

This is Abigail- lost her mother at childbirth, was raped at ten (10) years old by her cousin- Edwin, sexually exploited by Peter at twelve years, and lost her father through suicide "this is how she found her father. Hanging. From the hook where the ceiling fan had been" (Abani 80), trafficked for profiteering by brother-in-law, defiantly refused to mint pounds with her body and gradually becoming a dog as punishment. So, the dominant motif from the sacrilegious description above is an unambiguous jaw-dropping oppressive scene of agony and brutality towards Abigail body that is bruised beyond human recognition, reducing her to a dog. Here, the woman's body is lessened to nothing since the human rights of a being is removed because Abigail is handcuffed to a chain, in a doghouse, obligated to drink rancid water from the plate, sometimes with Peter's piss and fed with rotten food.

The lexical choice of words by Abani in depicting Abigail's traumatic experiences in London paints a severe and deplorable state that violently disturbs the ethical standards of the reader. With words like filth girl, handcuffed, chained to a doghouse, like a dirty dog who was spat on, peed on, drinks rancid water, sometimes his piss, and fed with rotting food invoke the visual remembrance associated with transatlantic slave trade. No wonder Chielozona Eze frowns at the poor treatment of African girls by traffickers and pimps as he suggests that "privileged persons should not lay claim to other humans the way they possess pets or other animals since humans are born free and have the right to life" (92). Funny enough, what Abani cleverly hides from the reader as a suspense is the daily raping of an Abigail tied to a stake as the narrator shockingly drops the bombshell that "Fifteen days, passing in the silence of snow. And she no longer fought when Peter mounted her." (Abani 94). Yes, Peter rapes his chained dog for fifteen days as her body is now too weak to fight him. From day fifteen, Abigail becomes an object without emotion, a sex toy bought and chained to a doghouse that can no longer say no to Peter's daily bruising of her body. It is a bruised body that might never recover from the trauma of Peter's ill-treatment even after killing him.

The traumatic experience of these trafficked girls is enormous and in resisting, they must fathom ways of surviving. In Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, the traumatic pain of horror is given to Nneoma by first, by African pimps and secondly, by her white customers. Firstly, Nneoma traumatic experience started when is deceived by the travelling agent that she has been given appointment as a teacher in a certain London school. Painfully but in actuality, she soon finds out that she is trafficked as she says "in Italy, I discover I am trafficked" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 128). Being trafficked, she is sold to Madam Dollars who "owns us now. She keeps us as prisoner in her flat" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 128) and are made to hit the street of Rome "selling sex to Italian men and foreigners" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 129). Recalling distressfully, Nneoma summarizes her traumatic life style in the hands of Madam Dollars in Italy as thus: "I am completely devastated by the life I'm forced to live: hit the night street, waiting for customers in winter, spring, summer and autumn; come back at dawn, wash, eat and sleep till it all begins at nightfall again" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 129).

The picture above paints a sad cyclic routine of Nneoma's life. Just like most diaspora female characters that are subjected to Homi Bhabha's othering tagging within the smaller black community as pimp lords over them, so also is the treatment given to girls in Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*. But more pathetic and excruciating is the attitude of White customers who according to Nneoma "demand positions I find despicable or refuse to use a condom" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 129). Even in the hands of Baron in London, Nneoma is equally traumatized as Baron "rapes and beats me when customers demand oral or anal sex without the use of condoms" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 132). It is a gloomy experience for Nneoma and any other bruised bodies

in the novel. No wonder Ifeoma Odinye opines that “the novel *Trafficked* unmasks the effects of traumatic experiences inflicted by traffickers on its victims” (47). It is a destructive feeling that hunts its victims for ever. Here, Spivak’s seminal question “can the subaltern speak?” depicts the gory pains of Nneoma and other bruised girls in the novel.

The effects of these traumatic experiences are manifold as Nneoma and other abused girls in the text must fashion out survival strategy to liberate themselves. Thus, Nneoma chooses both combative and subtle means to liberate herself. In Italy, under the control of Captain- a supervisor employed by Madam Dollars to oversee her girls, always maltreats Nneoma. To liberate herself from the grip of Captain, Nneoma adopts a combative resistance strategy to escape his daily abuses as she reveals that “once, while he is beating me, I grab captain’s penis and pull hard; he howls, letting go of me immediately. From that day, he becomes wary when he approaches me” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 130).

It is however pertinent to point out that Captain in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *Trafficked* should thank his God as Peter in Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* could not survive this combative strategy of liberation. By adopting this combative posture for her liberation, Captain knows that Nneoma is capable of doing other terrible things and this earns her, her freedom. But in London, Nneoma chooses a subtle resistance strategy of escape. With unreserved grip under the wings of Baron via the instrumentality of oath taking in Nigeria and threat that he “would cut off her legs and one of her breasts if she attempted to run away” (Adimora-Ezeigbo 67), Nneoma in fighting back, must plan her survival mission meticulously. However, luck smiles at her when Baron lost his wallet, which Nneoma picks it up later and hid it. She takes the money in the wallet and throws it away. Whenever she goes out, always under the company of Baron, she hides the money in her underwear, prepare to flee any day with the slightest opportunity. Luckily, the opportunity came and she escapes, and comes to live with Dingba until she is deported to Nigeria.

As a deported prostitute in Nigeria, Nneoma soon finds out that the trafficking monster -Baron is in the country and already dating one of the deported girl-Efe. Puzzled between the two deep waters of exposing him as a trafficker or remaining silent because she is not ready to testify in court, Nneoma adopts a non-confrontation resistance strategy as she avoids Baron totally. It is an alternative resistance strategy available to victims of trauma which encourages her recovery process. Here, avoidance as an alternative strategy becomes a healing balm for Nneoma as most traumatised victims prefer to avoid their tormentors as a method of trying hard not to remember terrible things they have done to them hitherto. Nneoma deploying the avoidance survival strategy to deal with Baron marries Shoshana Felman suggestion that in trauma theory, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms of remembering past traumatic events through flashbacks, nightmares or physical contact with oppressors should be avoided. This is so because it re-opens old wounds that bite harder. Confirming the avoidance solution as a therapeutic poultice for abused victims as postulated by Trauma theorists, when Nneoma discovers that Baron is the same man now bearing Fyneface in Nigeria and already dating her best friend- Efe, she refuses to report him to the police. Her reason is premised on the fact that Baron is highly connected in the Nigerian trafficking business that may likely inflict more pains on her and secondly, she is not ready to expose herself to the psychological aftermaths of painful remembrance of horrific experience while giving testimony in court. More importantly, she does want to be re-traumatised due to the social stigma associated with societal perception of deported prostitutes.

However, to demonstrate an arc of resistance in order to nib trafficking in the bud, Adimora-Ezeigbo introduces another tool of resistance in diaspora narrative called “sisterhood”. The most dominant strategy adopted by abused girls in diaspora narratives is the concept of sisterhood. Sisterhood in literature is an important element of second wave feminism which involves a collective sense of unity and purpose exhibited by women. It stresses a cordial friendship between women that are horizontal in social status than vertical mappings. In sharing the same bitter experiences in a linear relationship in literary creativity, women bond better to solve the same problem confronting them from common oppressors. And what are the common traumatic and heart-wrenching experiences that warrant sisterhood in distress especially among female migrants? They are sexual and inhuman traumatic experiences given to some of the female characters in *Trafficked*, first by their African brothers, sisters, husbands who act as pimps and secondly by white men who constitute their clientele. In applying sisterhood as a resistant tool of liberation, Nneoma gives all details of Baron trafficking activities in London and Nigeria to Efe. Efe shrewdly acting as the girl who Baron bought and maltreated in London, reports him to the Director of the Rehabilitation Center they are staying. The Director reported the case to the Police and Baron is put on the edge in Nigeria. Knowing that his secret has been exposed, Baron goes into hiding.

Also, in resisting and fighting back, the dehumanization of Abigail’s body in Abani’s *Becoming Abigail* is so traumatic that it needs different and violent strategy for survival. The visible bruising, exploitation, and degradation of Abigail’s body begins at a very tender age of ten when Edwin raped her and warns her not to tell anyone as well as Peter’s unholy move. However, her despondent sexual traumatic experience manifests actively in London where Peter turns her into a sex toy. Firstly, against her wish, she is given to a stranger she never knew to sleep with, which she overpowers, bites his hand deeply and escapes. For refusing to mint pounds for Peter, he turns her into dog chained to a doghouse while he rapes her daily. It is a horrific scene Abigail has to remember

painfully when looking at the past as Cathy Caruth posits that traumatic experience is a “belated feeling of a possessed image or event” (31). Peter viciously possessed Abigail as a toy, as she is helpless and silence throughout her ordeals of degradation. Silence for traumatized victim becomes the only means of overcoming the moment as Shoshana Felman avers that in traumatic situation, “victim revolves to silence- a dumb of both cognitive and linguistic breakdown” (40). As typical of a trauma novel, during her ordeal of rape for ten days, Abigail lost her cognition and voice to speak to anyone.

The effect of traumatic experience makes her dull and unable to comprehend what is happening to her very existence in every day. Hence, the eventual detachment of Abigail from society even after the killing of her oppressor affirms Ifeoma Odinye’s assertion on the effect of traumatic experience on a victim’s trust with the larger society that “in essence, the trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts the relationship between an individual and other people in a society by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral behaviours” (44). Thus, Peter’s moral behaviour needs to be questioned in the novel. How on earth will Peter turn a sixteen years old girl into a dog and sex toy? Does he possess a conscience? And why does Mary (Peter’s wife) sit idle and do nothing? These moral questions beg for answers.

Therefore, like the proverbial African goat that is pushed to the wall but must survive, is always open to only one option of fighting back- violently. Thus, Abigail must adopt a fierce resistance strategy urgently needed to survive Peter’s inhuman treatment. But in fighting back, Abigail invokes the spirit of her late mother- Abigail because she was named after her mother at birth, and regains her freedom combatively as the narrator informs us thus:

one night. Unable to stand it anymore, she screamed. Invoking the spirit of Abigail. And with her teeth tore off Peter’s penis. In the ensuing, Peter was bleeding. And Peter dying. There was no panic. Just the angel unlocking her cuffs. Go, the angel said. Go, Mary said. Abigail ran out, half naked, the severed penis clutched in her hand. Though the streets were crowded, only few people noticed this gorgon with bloody mouth and hands, and the grisly prize she held up like a torch as she ran (Abani 95-96).

Abigail toes the path of a combative resistance by biting off Peter’s Penis. It may be harsh for some readers and critics but it is the only option left for a traumatized Abigail to liberate herself.

Moreover, in war all is fair as Abigail is at the verge of death. Paradoxically, to curb traumatic oppression sometimes, violence is needed. This is because aggressive action in most cases, listens better to higher violence as victims of traumatic actions must react violently. Thus, this essay strongly supports the notion that traumatised victims irrespective of their wrong choices they might have made in life, must confront their oppressors combatively. This is why Frantz Fanon vigorously prescribes that “violence is cleansing force, it frees the oppressed from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction: It makes him fearless and restores self-respect” (73). Therefore, the only language oppressor like Peters and Captains of this world respect is violence, brutal and chaotic violence. In “The Fact of Blackness”, Frantz Fanon encourages the oppressed to use any possible means to fight the oppressors as he says “together we protested, we asserted the equality of all men in the world” (258), since we must “reject all immunization of emotions from oppressors” (259) and recommends that “with all my strength I refuse to accept amputation of defeat” (265). Thus, on the altar of natural justice, no one should shed crocodile tears for Peter’s death. While it is a fact that most girls may make wrong decisions of travelling abroad due to push factors without seeing red flags of being forced in prostitution, this essay does not support the bruising and dehumanization of the girl-child irrespective of wrong choice these girls have made since it can be corrected on the long run. All humans have the tendency of making mistakes, and making the wrong choice is not a death sentence, nor a permission for the bruising and dehumanisation of the woman body by any White men, pimps, traffickers and Madams.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of the African girl-child trafficked to Europe remains a disturbing example of the worst forms of dehumanization inflicted upon the female body. Her body is not only subjected to horrific and inhumane treatment but is also degraded as inferior through racism, rape, and neo-slavery practices. Unfortunately, this savage attitude turns her wounded body into a bruised soul, often incapable of full recovery. As a result of these traumatic experiences, some of these girls remain isolated for the rest of their lives if symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are not properly managed. In depicting such lived realities, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Chris Abani create characters whose bodies are bruised and traumatized, yet who fight back courageously against their oppressors. The study therefore argues that while Efe’s subtle resistance strategy of reporting Baron to the police is commendable, Nneoma’s act of striking Captain’s genitals and Abigail’s biting off Peter’s penis represent more combative forms of resistance. These actions function as a double-edged solution—serving both as punitive measures against the oppressors and as redemptive acts for the victims. However, the study concludes that although the combative strategy of inflicting physical injury or killing oppressors may be viewed as extreme, it reflects Adimora-Ezeigbo’s and Abani’s stylistic commitment to denouncing the continued bruising and traumatization of the female body by systems of oppression.

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