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The School as Agent of Formation and Transformation in Text and Context

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Abstract

One of the most widespread of forms of injustice in the African continent is trafficking in children and women. Its critical examination brings us to the underlying issues of poverty and the lack of professional and economic opportunities for young girls and women in rural as well as urban areas. This practice, which constitutes a violation of the rights of the children and women, throw the victims into painful conditions as manifested in forms of corporal punishment, rape and all other forms of abusive exploitation of their human rights. From the sociological approach to literature, this paper examines some possible ways through which the school can serve as a viable agent for the solid formation of individuals who would comfortably resist all forms of temptation to trafficking and at the same time, serve as a good instrument for the transformation of the ones who are rescued from such obnoxious business. The findings of this study will be of help to all who are involved in the social network of rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked persons. It will also serve as a useful guide to further researches in this field of study.

Key Words: School, Agent, Formation, Transformation, Text, Context

Introduction

The school can be referred to as an institution where teaching and learning take place. In other words, it is a place or an institution in which persons are instructed in different kinds of learning. It is the storehouse of

knowledge from which people source the knowledge which they need for controlling and governing their own environment. The school helps man to learn about, control and domesticate nature ultimately for his own self-realization and fulfilment. Whereas, man

is a social being in that he lives in groups or communities, acts and realises his major objectives in social life, the school has a role to play in the realisation of these objectives. From nursery, primary to the higher institutions of learning, the school grooms and equips individuals for their roles in the society. The school is that institution which makes man "the minister and interpreter of nature". This is owing to the fact that the school imparts in man the knowledge, which gives him the power to understand the human nature for his own advantage and well-being. From the lower level (the nursery school), the school stands a chance of fixing the choice of an individual. An instance is seen in the innocence with which a little school child believes as the ultimate truth everything he learns from the teacher as well as the difficulty involved in getting the child to drop any incorrect idea or expression learned from the teacher. These little ones go to school with their minds open to welcome and assimilate whatever they're taught. Though already endowed with intellect to understand, foresee and plan, the school guides them from childhood to harness and manipulate properly the natural gift, which is usually latent at such early age. In this way, the school has a very significant role to play in

directing and counseling the pupils or students.

Human trafficking on the other hand, can be loosely defined as corrupt or illegal trade on human beings. Strictly speaking, it refers to fraudulent recruitment, transfer or harbouring of persons by means of threat or deceit for exploitative purposes. Human trafficking can be embarked on for the purposes of prostitution, forced labour, rituals, among others. One can be involved either in self-trafficking or can be trafficked by another. Self-trafficking usually occurs when one offers the body in exchange for any other thing desired.

Commenting on a TV discussion recently, a controller with immigration (Prince Afolami) describes trafficking as "the carrying of human beings from one country to another illegally". Human trafficking, which has existed in Nigeria for quite some time. Increased at an alarming rate with the downturn of our economy during the early 80s to the late 90s as breadwinners of families lost their jobs, and parents had to spend more time in search of jobs and money to feed their families. The greed for money increased, and a lot of parents lost focus and abandoned the traditional upbringing of their children, morally, spiritually and socially. Many

enlightened women like Funmi Osho have pointed out that the lack of character moulding in some families is at the root of the problem with the result that under economic pressure or difficulty, such as daughters or wives easily turn to prostitution. She emphasizes that parents and guardians need to inculcate discipline and teach their children the right and biblical perspective of sex right from their age of reason. Also, religious leaders ought to teach more the value of contentment to save people from greed and the fangs of materialism.

In addition, lack of parental love and care could be responsible for the lack of self-esteem, which easily makes victims turn to prostitution. How else would one agree to sleep with a dog for money?

Most victims of human trafficking (the free ones anyway) confess that though they have gained economically, they have lost heavily emotionally and physically. Put on a scale, the losses in prostitution far outweighs the gain(s). The victims of human trafficking encounter different types of treatment from customers. Some are ashamed of themselves, but still cannot summon the courage to quit. Some of their customers look on them with contempt and disdain such that they would use the victims, beat them and may even

refuse to pay them. Recounting her experiences, Dora says “sometimes you could be beaten to stupor before your fellow prostitutes come to your rescue”. Irene, an even-tempered good-looking woman confesses more of their negative experiences:

sometimes men much younger than you are would use you very roughly and tell you to your face that they have to enjoy their money’s worth. I never forget to give them sound advice on customer’s relations, and most times, I get apologised to. Most times however, I’m filled with a deep sadness - a feeling that my life is very wrong.

Consoling, is the fact that the government and some Non-governmental Organizations are becoming more aware of these facts behind the trade of prostitution, and are making concerted efforts to frustrate such atrocious activities. Examples are the new bill on prostitution in Edo State and the campaign by the wife of the Vice President, Mrs. Titi Abubakar against trafficking in women and children through her NGO-WOTCLEF (Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation).

Significance of the School to the Individual and the Society

The significance of the school to both individual and the society can be discussed under the following headings, among others:

- Enlightenment-information.
- Culture transmission and assimilation
- Shaping one's destiny
- Provision of manpower needs.

The school can be seen as an indispensable factor in the life of the modern man in the sense that it is an abode of knowledge and without knowledge, there may not be much difference between man and beast. The school educates, enlightens and informs. When one is educated, enlightened and informed, he naturally attains a certain level of refinement in thoughts, speech and action. Characteristically, man is endowed, among other things, with intellect to understand, foresee, plan, will, carry out and pursue his plans and general values in a community. His freedom gives him easy way in his range and choice of activities as well as opportunities to make mistakes. Of course, if human beings were mechanical entities, Krishnamurti reminds us that:

The future would be predictable, and the plans for a perfect utopia could be drawn up; then, we could plan carefully a future society and work towards it. But human beings are not machines to be

established according to a definite plan whereas a society, a good one particularly, has to be established according to some plan. Consequently, man lives in his environment or society, at least, with a view to perpetuate it and make it satisfy his needs. He has values, beliefs and attitudes which he cherishes and which he wishes to transmit to the young. He learns through experience and from the people around him how to cope with life and survive his environment (which is often cruel and uncertain). Life itself becomes an art with a way to live and learn from it, particularly through association with one's neighbours.

If the school harbours students with healthy cultures, they are bound to cherish and display healthy attitude towards one another, and also towards the larger society. Where, on the other hand, the school harbours students who are groomed in vicious activities of different kinds, the general student body will be adversely affected by such unhealthy cultures (if the school authority does not intervene). Human trafficking (which is one of such unhealthy ways of life) is gradually penetrating and gaining grounds in our various institutions of learning (especially the tertiary institutions). Some of the victims regard it as fun, and as

such, do not know the implications. In Hagher's Aishatu, for instance, Aisha (who regards Rekiya as a senior and even a mentor), toes the same path of the "School Big Girls" and, unfortunately, finds it difficult to identify the boundary that should not be crossed. Alhaji Wadi lures Aisha into a beautifully furnished apartment, where she is exposed to a very high standard of living. He and his men use Aisha as agent of drug trafficking – the ugly job to which she loses her sanity. Aishatu (being blind folded by her new world of dress) returns insolence and arrogance to Rekiya's warning:

...enough of this nonsense (whining and moaning like a kid. I know what I am doing. If I become a mad woman, its none of your business. This is my life, not yours, I see your thick jealousy ... so, you don't want me to be rich, to become an international cash madam, a lady with a standing, a lady dressed in gold and diamonds; A guest at every state banquet, a lady of consequence and means, whose image conjures sexual fantasies, in all men (p. 133)?

The same Aishatu, who imagines herself the first among equals, is soon thrown into mental imbalance by the effects of drug addiction and trafficking. All her so-called friends (including Alhaji and Rekiya) desert her. Under the influence of the drugs, she

tears her clothes off and begins to dance round the flat, calling Udeng (her sixty year old male servant).

... udeng! udeng!!
udeng!!!... you goat,
you gorilla, you
scheming ruffian,
baboon, you have
been going to heaven
and stealing my little
angels and their eggs.
I will swallow you.
(she collapses) p. 15.

So she earns insanity in exchange of the material wealth which she gets from people who are too rich and too cunning for her.

Though the cause of trafficking can be largely attributed to poverty, some students involve in such demeaning act due to defective self-image. This is where counselling has a big role to play. Of course, Aishatu could have resisted the temptation of falling a prey to Alhaji if she had found herself under virtuous girls as her mentors or if she had, at least, been protected by balanced counsellin from the school. The school should therefore include in its curriculum, a counselling programme which can help to build up the students' self-concept. The programme will, invariably, serve as a public enlightenment campaign against human trafficking. The need for the enlightenment should be considered and

treated as exigent because as long as the community life exists, people must always learn from one another, and what one imitates is what is there to be imitated. As a matter of fact, as Kingsley Price rightly notes: “The young of the species cannot survive to maturity unless they assimilate some beliefs about the world, some attitudes towards it and some skill in solving the practical problems it presents, and the only source from which they can derive is the culture that is prevalent in their communities.”

The school, by its nature, also serves as an instrument for the rehabilitation and transformation of already trafficked persons. For instance, Nneoma (the protagonist of Ezeigbo’s *TRAFFICKED* some refreshing and healing atmosphere at OASIS, the Vocational Institute where she was sent for rehabilitation (and possible transformation). Of course, she finds a new world, where she trains as a tailor and acquires the skill which helps her to secure a job for a decent livelihood. There, she also finds a friend, Efe, who (like every most students of that institution) is also rescued from trafficking. She and Efe find confidants in each other and naturally begin to heal from the emotional trauma in which they were deeply sunk. This is evident in their private conversation:

The air was cool and the night quiet. A few stars twinkled in the sky, looking down on a world that disregarded their light. Nneoma took a deep breath and then let out the air from her lungs with some force. Shutting her eyes, she tilted her head back and reined in this position for a full minute. A few tears escaped the prison of her eyes and slid down her face. Efe gazed at her but did not say anything for a while...Efe broke the silence.”Nneoma, how do you feel?” Nneoma opened her eyes. “I feel cleansed, my body feels light. Efe, thank you for listening to my story”(134 -135).

The school thus serves as one of those social agencies which offers the enlightenment and learning processes that are pursued with a calculated attempt to help individuals realize and fulfil themselves in and through their cultures. With the necessary skills, values, beliefs and traditions of one’s culture systematically studied or imparted, the school, as a formal or organized institution, serves as an agent for integrating individuals with their environment, developing their inherent powers and equipping them for life’s multi-faceted struggles. The school, therefore, offers the students (from childhood to adulthood) an irresistible weapon against self-trafficking in particular, and human trafficking in general. This is attributed to the

fact that through the school and its organized activities, one fulfils (over a period of time) one's basic needs and actualize one's power at the main levels of one's being, physical, mental and spiritual. Of course, one of the purposes of the school according to Krishnamurti, is "to bring about an integrated individual who is capable of dealing with life as a whole".

In the true sense, the school helps in educating the individual to be mature and free and, to flow greatly in love and goodness. In other words, the school assists the individual in the development of moral qualities as it systematically or programmatically teaches one to actualize one's innate powers through the gradual acquisition of necessary skills to master one's environment and adequately cope with life as whole. Therefore, the school plays a vital role in shaping one's destiny.

The importance of education in the life of an individual cannot be overemphasized. The term, "education" has been derived from the Latin word "educate", which means "to rear, to nourish, to bring up, to train". Modern writers have assigned many and varied meanings to this term. It has been described as a "process of adjustment", as a "means of developing social efficiency", as "the progressive remaking of environment", as

"the formation of habits", as "a way of life", as "reconstruction of experience", as "development of personality, and in some instances, as a combination of several or all of these.

Along this line, education may be defined as that form of social activity whereby under the direction of mature minds and by the use of adequate means, the physical, intellectual and moral powers of the immature human being are so developed as to prepare him for the accomplishment of his life goals.

Very significant is the fact that the school provides manpower needs of the larger society. It is generally recognized that one of the major (if not the most important in contemporary (times) functions of educational system is to produce the pool of skilled manpower, which the nation needs to grow economically. This function is more so true for the economically developing countries where there is a need not only to increase the rate of economic growth by an appropriate investment in human capital but also to replace costly expatriate manpower by skilled indigenous personnel. By training people in different fields of endeavor through different programmes (first school leaving, secondary school certificate, Diploma,

National Certificate of Education, OND, HND, Degree, etc), the school generates for the society the skilled manpower that is needed to man the labour field.

The economic miracles of the developed countries are as a result of human capability. Investing in people does not only bring about phenomenal economic growth but also guarantees equitable development where the generality of the citizenry has the opportunity to contribute to and secure qualitative progress in their lives. The school development of human capabilities and is simultaneously involved in the continuous upgrading in technology, work organizations and competition through retraining and other capacity-building techniques. It recruits and trains manpower for priority provision for the basic social infrastructures that facilitate the acquisition of skills, capabilities and new capacities.

Recommended ways Through which the School Can Combat Human Trafficking/Conclusion

The statement, “an unexamined life is not worth living”, attributed to Socrates is as much as gem of wisdom as it was at the time of Socrates. It is therefore, important that a person takes to systematically review various aspects of his life, most especially those

aspects that have or will have bearing on his work life, for “work makes a man”. Therefore, the school should integrate into its curriculum a comprehensive counselling programme should give informational service to the students, teachers, the parents and the school administrators. Such programme should be specially directed at information on the applications of human trafficking on the trafficked, the traffickers, and society at large. This programme (if properly articulated) should be to stimulate the students to evaluate themselves and their opportunities, make a feasible choice in the light of their unique characteristics and opportunities, and also make an appraisal of their values and personality traits. Such programmes should be made as compulsory as the General Studies (G.S.) courses; if administered otherwise, only those who show interest will benefit from them.

In order to nip the problem from the bud, teachers should earnestly discourage students from indulging in body trafficking either for examination marks or for any other thing. The school authority should, in turn, take appropriate disciplinary measures against teachers or students who encourage body/human trafficking in one-way or the other.

Furthermore, the school should embark on anti-trafficking programme which will develop gradually rather than being superimposed abruptly on students and staff. A reasonable measure of careful planning and concern for the interests and view of every staff member and student is required for the development of an adequate programme. The school should, as much as possible, involve the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) when need arises in the financing of such programme. Hence, manpower news notes:

It should however, not be forgotten that the real solution lies in poverty alleviation and in strengthening community actions that promote human dignity and societal progress, and in the pursuit of income generation programmes that respect the cultural values of the beneficiaries.

Resolutions are good beginning but not sufficient in themselves. Every child needs the support of all to develop the potentials to the fullest. The immediate future will certainly entertain more discussions on the matter. The anti-human trafficking programme should be idealistic in its current performance. It has been said that a good leader stays in sight of his followers lest they lose sight of the direction he is taking.

Similarly, the anti-trafficking programme should not attempt services that are beyond the experience and training of the staff members. Beneficiaries receive little benefit when such services are ineptly administered or when staff members are confused by the programme. The beneficiaries should therefore, be made to feel free, draw close and open up to the program instructors. If the aforementioned measures are conscientiously observed, the school will undoubtedly serve as a dynamic and viable agent for combating women trafficking.

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