

# Migration, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Implications for 'Japa' Syndrome in Selected Post-Colonial Texts

Sunday OlaOluwagbamila Dawodu<sup>1\*</sup>, Gracious Ojebun<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D., Department of Language and Literature, College of Arts and Sciences, William V.S. Tubman University, Harper, Maryland, Liberia

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D., Department of Foreign Languages, University of Benin, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Migration has become a prevalent strategy for vulnerable women and girls seeking better opportunities. This study examines the intricate relationship between migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery through a qualitative approach, utilising Dressel & MacDonald (2018) and George & Bennett's (2005) comparative textual analysis. By analysing Nawal El Sadaawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), the study highlights the vulnerabilities faced by characters Firdaus and Lakshmi, paralleling the experiences of Nigerian women pursuing 'Japa' (emigration). Crenshaw's (2013) Intersectionality theory provides the framework for understanding these complexities. The study indicates a significant risk of exploitation during migration, emphasising the struggles for agency amidst economic migration. The study calls for increased awareness, education, and policy interventions to address the risks of 'Japa,' human trafficking, and modern slavery, advocating for systemic changes to protect and empower women.

## 1. Introduction/ Background

In the 21st century, there has been a significant increase in human movement, as people are motivated by a combination of circumstances to leave their native countries in pursuit of improved living conditions. Nevertheless, this desire for a more promising future may transform into a distressing ordeal, especially for women and young girls undertaking perilous voyages to affluent countries. This sense of desperation often arises from the harsh realities prevailing in their countries of origin, which are marked by poverty, restricted opportunities for education and healthcare, and widespread gender disparity. In this oppressive atmosphere, possibilities are few and hope diminishes. The combination of these circumstances contributes to the occurrence of 'Japa,' a Nigerian word representing a risky attempt at socioeconomic migration. Nevertheless, this risky endeavour has a significant cost, as defenceless migrants become susceptible targets for traffickers who manipulate their desperation by offering false promises of employment and a more promising future. Once enticed, these people get trapped in a horrifying existence of coerced employment, sexual

\* Corresponding author's E-mail address: [dwdinfiniti@gmail.com](mailto:dwdinfiniti@gmail.com), [sdawodu@tubmanu.edu.lr](mailto:sdawodu@tubmanu.edu.lr)

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exploitation, and contemporary enslavement. Places like Libya, and even developed nations such as the UK and the USA, have become breeding grounds for these horrific crimes.

This research explores the stories of women who are trapped in the complex network of migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery. It focuses on how these concerns have emerged as significant worldwide phenomena in recent times. This study seeks to expose the harsh reality of poverty, limited opportunities, gender inequality, and the transformation of aspirations for a better life into a nightmarish existence by examining Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006). Firdaus and Lakshmi, the main characters in these stories, demonstrate the many dimensions of vulnerability, resilience, agency, and resistance in the distressing context of human trafficking and contemporary slavery.

## **2. Historical Context and Contemporary Relevance**

Throughout history, migration has played a crucial role in human civilization, providing chances for better living standards, fleeing from conflicts, and achieving socio-economic progress. Nevertheless, the 21st century has observed an alarming increase in human trafficking and modern slavery, with a greater impact on women, especially those who are rendered vulnerable due to dire circumstances in their countries of origin and seek a better future through migration (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009; Faist, 2018; Rana & Roy, 2021; Patterson, 2012; Frankel, 2017; Antoniazzi, 2011). Women and girls are among the victims of human traffickers and contemporary slave merchants. This is because exploitative practices targeting women flourish due to existing gender inequalities, social vulnerabilities, and power imbalances. These practices force vulnerable migrant groups, who are seeking improved lives, into the hidden world of global human trafficking and modern slavery, often resulting in severe consequences.

## **3. Overview of the Selected Novels**

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) explores the convergence of migration, human trafficking, modern enslavement, gender subjugation, and the struggle for individual identity within a patriarchal society. The novel is set in Egypt and focuses on Firdaus, who narrates her life story from childhood until her eventual incarceration. The tale strongly condemns the institutional oppression of women, socio-economic inequalities, and the dehumanising effects of power imbalances that make migration a highly troubling occurrence. El Saadawi's tale progresses through a series of interconnected vignettes, each of which unveils a different aspect of Firdaus's existence. Firdaus's narrative encompasses the various levels of violence, manipulation, and financial vulnerability that shape her life, starting from her early encounters with parental mistreatment and coerced marriage, leading up to her final involvement in prostitution. Her final act of rebellion, which is murder, places her at the central 'point zero,' a critical moment where she regains control over her actions and faces those who oppress her, ultimately resulting in her imprisonment.

This account reflects the horrible ordeals faced by several migrants who undertake the dangerous voyage from Africa to Europe. For these individuals, migration serves as a form of resistance against repressive circumstances and restricted prospects in their country of origin. They endanger their lives to flee from poverty, conflict, and persecution. The arduous aspects of their voyage involve formidable environmental obstacles in the Sahel deserts and the treacherous passage across the Mediterranean Sea, where the constant danger of dying at sea is always present. However, despite the challenges they face, their voyage symbolises a bold and determined effort to regain control and strive for a more promising future. Nevertheless,

similar to Firdaus, numerous migrants find themselves imprisoned, either held in custody in foreign countries or sadly perishing in their quest for a more promising 'point zero' - a critical moment where they aspire to break free from persecution and discover fresh prospects in Europe.

The story not only provides a scathing critique of patriarchal structures that maintain the commercialisation and devaluation of women but also pushes readers to confront the unfathomable terror and degradation experienced by vulnerable migrants worldwide. This text prompts us to recognise the difficult challenges experienced by numerous migrant women in their search for self-identity, opposition, and the intricate nature of empowerment under the harsh circumstances encountered by marginalised migrants.

Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold* (2006) is a dramatic examination of migration, human trafficking, and contemporary slavery, focusing on the experiences of a young Nepali girl named Lakshmi. The novel takes place in rural Nepal and Kolkata, focusing on Lakshmi's journey as she is trafficked to a brothel in Kolkata, India. The narrative of her story takes place in the context of destitution and susceptibility, emphasising the recurring pattern of poverty that compels individuals to resort to desperate migration. Lakshmi's narrative serves as a prime example of how destitute conditions generate susceptibility, revealing how migrants in vulnerable situations become ensnared in a complex network of hardship. Limited or restricted opportunity for education, healthcare, and economic prospects frequently compels individuals to engage in 'Japa'—the act of migrating to foreign countries in search of improved living conditions. Nevertheless, as they strive to escape, the unyielding pattern of cruelty pulls them back into poverty, prolonging the cycle for multiple generations and endangering their lives.

Despite her circumstances, Lakshmi wrestles with a longing for dignity, self-esteem, and the urge to be reunited with her family. The protagonist's efforts to resist, exemplified by the relationships she establishes with other girls at the brothel, illustrate the unwavering resilience of the human spirit when confronted with hardship. The novel explores profound inquiries regarding worldwide power structures, destitution, and the transformation of human lives into commodities, specifically for migrants from poor economies who aspire to improve their lives in the rich world. The novel *Sold* (2006) showcases a rare aptitude for blending empathy with unflinching candour, encouraging readers to participate in dialogues concerning action, advocacy, and the urgent need to eradicate contemporary slavery. It serves as evidence of the enduring strength of the human spirit and a plea for action against one of the most urgent current problems.

#### **4. The Intersection of Migration, Human Trafficking, and Modern Slavery in the Selected Novels**

Migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery are interconnected global phenomena with devastating consequences, particularly for vulnerable populations like women and children. Hence, the examination of these issues through the lens of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006). By citing relevant scholarship, the review will compare and contrast the novels' portrayals of migration's complexities, the entrapment of trafficking, and the enduring reality of modern slavery. It will further connect these literary representations to broader social issues and highlight the potential of literature to raise awareness and advocate for change.

The rise in human trafficking and modern slavery is intricately linked to the experiences of migrant women. Gender inequalities, poverty, and limited opportunities in their home countries create conditions that make them vulnerable to exploitation. Traffickers exploit

these vulnerabilities, luring women with false promises of better lives, only to subject them to forced labour, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009; Faist, 2018; Rana & Roy, 2021).

By conducting a comparative analysis, Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006) highlight the struggles of women in the cycle of migration, human trafficking, and contemporary enslavement. The narratives, based on the characters Firdaus and Lakshmi, reveal the vulnerabilities, resilience, agency, and resistance faced by these women. Firdaus's story presents a stark indictment of patriarchal oppression, with her act of murder highlighting the extreme consequences of her journey. Lakshmi's story, set in rural Nepal and Kolkata, exemplifies the cyclical nature of poverty and exploitation, highlighting the vulnerability faced by migrants.

## **5. Literature Review: Gender, Agency, and the Constraints of Choice**

Migration and human trafficking narratives are deeply embedded in gendered power dynamics, a concept examined by Hamid (2020). Hamid's analysis aligns with Rahman (2018) and Smith (2019), who emphasise the intersectionality of gender, class, and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of trafficked individuals. Rahman specifically highlights the disproportionate vulnerability faced by marginalised women like Firdaus and Lakshmi, protagonists of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006) respectively. Smith, drawing from postcolonial feminist theory, elucidates how colonial legacies perpetuate systems of exploitation and disempowerment for women in the Global South.

Hamid (2020) and Rahman (2018) both argue that the experiences of trafficked individuals are shaped by intersecting oppressions. However, while Hamid focuses on the broader gendered power dynamics, Rahman emphasises the specific vulnerabilities of marginalised women through the lens of intersectionality. This approach is further supported by Crenshaw (2017) and Hill Collins (2000), who underscore the importance of considering multiple intersecting identities in understanding social inequalities. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality reveals how Firdaus's and Lakshmi's identities as poor, marginalised women compound their vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation.

Smith (2019) complements this analysis by discussing how postcolonial legacies continue to affect contemporary gendered power dynamics. Her work intersects with Rahman's by highlighting the historical roots of these inequalities, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic factors contributing to modern slavery. Together, these scholars offer a multifaceted perspective on the gendered experiences of trafficked individuals, emphasising the need to address structural inequalities to combat these issues effectively.

However, contrary to the arguments posed by Hamid, Rahman, and Smith, some scholars critique the use of literature in perpetuating stereotypes. Showalter (2012), Afshar & Maynard (2000), and hooks (2000) argue that literary depictions can reinforce negative stereotypes about marginalised groups. However, Tirrell (2016) and King & Bond (2002) counter this critique by highlighting the potential of literature for empowerment and advocacy. They argue that by amplifying the voices of marginalised women, authors like El Saadawi and McCormick challenge societal norms and expose the systemic issues perpetuating trafficking and modern slavery.

Tirrell (2016) contends that literature can serve as a powerful tool for social change by fostering empathy and understanding among readers. This perspective is echoed by Morrison

& McKay (1983) and Walker (2008), who assert that literature's role in critiquing social injustices is crucial for raising awareness and inspiring action. El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and McCormick's *Sold* exemplify this potential, as they bring to light the harsh realities faced by marginalised women and urge multifaceted interventions to address the intersecting forms of oppression that render them vulnerable.

While Hamid (2020), Rahman (2018), and Smith (2019) provide valuable insights into the gendered dynamics of migration and trafficking, their analyses could benefit from a more nuanced exploration of agency within oppressive contexts. Ahmed (2017) critiques the Western-centric understanding of agency, arguing for a more context-specific analysis that considers the constraints imposed by intersecting systems of oppression. This critique is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of Firdaus and Lakshmi, whose actions are often constrained by their socio-economic and gendered realities.

Nguyen (2016) extends this discourse by emphasising the importance of recognising agency within contexts of survival and resistance. Nguyen argues that scholars should resist victim-blaming narratives and instead highlight the resilience and agency of marginalised individuals within oppressive structures. This perspective enhances our understanding of Firdaus's and Lakshmi's apparent passivity, framing it as a testament to the oppressive systems they navigate rather than a reflection of their lack of agency.

Corlett & Mavin (2014) and Crenshaw (2017) further underscore the significance of intersectionality in analysing the experiences of trafficked individuals. Hill Collins (2000) and Davis (2019) emphasise the interplay of various social identities and how intersecting oppressions compound vulnerability. This framework is crucial for understanding the experiences of Firdaus and Lakshmi, whose marginalised identities exacerbate their susceptibility to exploitation. However, these scholars could delve deeper into how intersecting identities also shape the forms of resistance and agency exhibited by these characters.

### **5.1. The Power of Literature for Advocacy**

El Saadawi's (2015) and McCormick's (2006) works challenge critiques of literature as perpetuating stereotypes by offering nuanced and empowering portrayals of marginalised women. By giving voice to characters like Firdaus and Lakshmi, these authors expose the systemic issues underlying human trafficking and modern slavery while also highlighting the resilience and agency of these women. This aligns with the assertions of Tirrell (2016), King & Bond (2002), Morrison & McKay (1983), and Walker (2008) regarding literature's role in critiquing social injustices and fostering empathy.

Through their narratives, *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and *Sold* (2006) serve as poignant tools for advocacy, urging readers to confront the harsh realities faced by vulnerable migrants and to act against the systems that perpetuate these issues. By illuminating the intersecting forms of oppression that render women like Firdaus and Lakshmi vulnerable, these novels contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised individuals and inspire action towards a more just and equitable world.

### **5.2. Conclusion**

This literature review has explored the interconnected issues of migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery as depicted in *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and *Sold* (2006). Through the lens of these novels, this review has highlighted the economic drivers of migration, the blurred lines between voluntary and involuntary movement, and the impact of gendered

power dynamics on agency. It has further critiqued these scholarly perspectives, emphasising the need for a more nuanced understanding of agency and the importance of intersectionality in analysing the experiences of trafficked individuals.

By bringing these issues to light, El Saadawi's and McCormick's works contribute to a deeper comprehension of the challenges faced by vulnerable migrants and underscore the potential of literature to serve as a tool for critique and advocacy. This review demonstrates the power of intersectionality and feminist frameworks in understanding women's experiences of migration and modern slavery, ultimately inspiring action towards addressing the systemic inequalities that perpetuate these issues.

## **6. Methodology**

This study examines the intricacies of Japa Syndrome, which refers to the phenomena of Nigerians engaging in desperate migration, by analysing certain postcolonial writings. The research sheds light on the experiences and vulnerabilities of women who are affected by migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery. It uses a qualitative approach and a comparative analysis framework.

### **6.1. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical underpinnings of this research are derived from the seminal work of Denzin and Lincoln (1994) on qualitative inquiry. Their emphasis on a comprehensive comprehension of lived experiences is especially pertinent to convey the essence of the triumphs and challenges faced by women as they navigate the perilous terrain of 'Japa.' Additionally, the comparative analysis approach of George and Bennett (2005) enables a nuanced examination of the selected texts, specifically *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) by Nawal El Saadawi and *Sold* (2006) by Patricia McCormick. This comparative approach allows for a distinguish between the specific contexts of Firdaus's journey in Egypt and Lakshmi's experiences in Nepal, as well as to identify recurring themes and motifs across the novels. In addition, this comparative lens will be crucial in establishing a connection between the fictional narratives and the real-life experiences of Nigerian women pursuing 'Japa.' By contrasting the literary portrayals with documented experiences, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations, vulnerabilities, and potential exploitation that these women encounter.

Literary analysis is the primary method for engaging with the selected texts, as it reveals lived experiences. Valuable insights into the social, economic, and political forces that drive Firdaus and Lakshmi towards migration can be obtained by closely examining the events that shape their experiences. This thorough examination enables the study to offer insights into the obstacles they encounter and to recognise the identity they exert within the limitations of their circumstances.

This study investigates the extent to which economic destitution makes individuals susceptible to exploitation, following Kevin Bales' (2004) argument regarding the ambiguous distinctions between voluntary migration and forced trafficking. The novels themselves prove to be potent illustrations of this concept. In *Woman at Point Zero* (2015), Firdaus's migration from war-torn her home town to Cairo in Egypt is purportedly a pursuit of economic opportunities. However, her narrative reveals the manipulative strategies employed by traffickers who exploit her desperation for a better life. In a similar vein, *Sold* (2006) depicts Lakshmi's compelled migration to Nepal, India, which was caused by destitution and limited viable alternatives.

## 6.2. Framework for Understanding Vulnerability: Gender and Intersectionality

Although Bales (2004) emphasises economic factors as the primary motivators of human trafficking, this study recognises the constraints of such a singular perspective. It acknowledges that gender substantially influences the experiences of exploitation and migration, drawing on the work of Parreñas (2001). Firdaus and Lakshmi, as well as innumerable other female migrants, are subject to distinct vulnerabilities as a result of entrenched power dynamics and societal norms. These dynamics frequently impede their mobility, restrict their access to resources, and make them more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

This research also recognises the constraints of exclusively concentrating on economic factors, as emphasised by Gozdziaik and Collett (2005). Their argument emphasises the necessity of a more nuanced approach that recognises the intricate interplay of sociopolitical factors, such as gender inequality, conflict, and government corruption, which significantly contribute to the perpetuation of human trafficking. By adopting an intersectional framework, the study transcends a singular focus on economic hardship and delve deeper into the structural inequalities and power imbalances that serve as breeding grounds for trafficking networks. This all-encompassing strategy enables the study to promote strategies that not only mitigate economic vulnerabilities but also eliminate the systemic factors that facilitate the proliferation of trafficking.

The secondary sources, including scholastic articles, reports by NGOs that address human trafficking and migration issues, and pertinent government documents further enrich the data collected through this literary analysis. Using these secondary sources enables the research to triangulate the findings obtained from the literary analysis with real-world data on 'Japa Syndrome' and the experiences of Nigerian women, thereby providing essential context. The objective of this triangulation is to develop a more thorough comprehension of the phenomenon and its social, economic, and political ramifications.

## 7. Migration, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery in *Woman at Point Zero* (2016) and *Sold* (2006)

Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* (2015) is a significant feminist literary work that exposes the intersections between migration, vulnerability, trafficking, and modern slavery and the exploration of women's agency and resistance against oppression. The novel highlights the intersectional struggles of women in Egyptian society, highlighting the cyclical nature of female oppression. Olugbemi-Gabriel and Dawodu (2016) blame the pervasive oppression of women in the Arab world, particularly Egypt, on a toxic blend of culture and religion. El-Enany (2010) examines the novel through a postcolonial lens, highlighting its impact on gender dynamics, particularly as failed aspiration can lead to a life of crime, destitution, hopelessness and even suicide. Malti-Douglas (1990) explores El Saadawi's work in the context of feminist theory, highlighting how Firdaus's embrace of death challenges conventional notions of empowerment to encapsulate the experiences of vulnerable women migrants.

Similarly, McCormick's *Sold* (2006), is a scholarly work that explores human trafficking, modern slavery, and the resilience of its protagonist. Hosseini and Tarlo (2017) and Pham (2012) analyse *Sold's* representation of trafficking and its role in children's literature, exposing the experiences of vulnerable migrants. Smith (2011) analyses the novel's artistic choices, including verse, and its emotional impact on readers. to illuminate the themes of migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery. Smith's insight demonstrates how McCormick's use of poetic form enhances the emotional impact on readers. The rhythmic

verses of the book serve as a powerful vehicle to convey the harrowing experiences of trafficking victims, evoking empathy, and a deeper understanding of their plight. McCormick's artistic choices, skilfully dissected by Smith, thus contribute to a more profound exploration of these pressing issues, making *Sold* (2006), a poignant narrative that resonates with the harsh realities of migration and humans.

The analysis of power dynamics and agency in the context of modern slavery is crucial in understanding the experiences of the characters in these novels. Power dynamics play a central role in both novels, as they reveal the deficiencies in labour governance systems that facilitate the exploitation of migrant workers. In *Woman at Point Zero* (2015), Firdaus's journey is marked by power imbalances inherent in patriarchal and economic systems (El-Saadawi 2015. p.13-14 & 34-35), while in *Sold* (2006), Lakshmi's vulnerability stems from economic disparity and gender-based exploitation both of which fuelled and result to their oppression and inhuman treatment.

Both novels highlight the interrelationships among migration, human trafficking, and contemporary forms of enslavement by demonstrating how migrants become vulnerable to exploitation due to deficiencies in legal frameworks. The characters' efforts to exercise agency within oppressive contexts are also highlighted. Firdaus's defiance against her oppressors in *Woman at Point Zero* (2015), represents a form of agency that emerges from her realization of the limited options available to her as a woman. In *Sold* (2006), Lakshmi's resilience and determination to escape her exploitative situation showcase her agency in the face of dire circumstances. These narratives emphasize the need for a more comprehensive understanding of migrant experiences, moving beyond victimhood to recognize the agency and power within these communities.

Therefore, Firdaus's and Lakshmi's defiance and resilience against their oppressors and oppression can be seen as a response to the desperate circumstances, migrants are subjected to (El-Saadawi 2015). With limited options for a better life, acts of defiance by vulnerable migrants can manifest in criminal activities as a means of survival, such as engaging in illicit work or becoming involved in the illegal economy due to a lack of legal opportunities (El-Saadawi 2015. P. 35). Additionally, the constant threat of exploitation can lead to psychological distress, potentially resulting in depression, suicide, human trafficking, trafficking drugs, and voodoo economy/spirituality.

Social maladjustment may occur when these individuals, after escaping or being rescued, struggle to reintegrate into society due to the stigmatization they may face as victims or survivors of human trafficking. They may find it challenging to rebuild their lives, leading to a sense of isolation and exclusion.

Drawing upon a feminist and trauma studies perspective, this study further sheds light on the intricate connections between gendered vulnerabilities, exploitation, and the profound psychological trauma experienced by the female protagonists in the selected literary works. The multifaceted consequences of migration and human trafficking on the individual psyche as depicted in the narratives within *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and *Sold* (2006), which offer insights into the experiences of Firdaus and Lakshmi female as they grapple with the intersection of gendered vulnerabilities, exploitation, and profound psychological trauma.

The selected works depict the transformation of Firdaus and Lakshmi from naive and optimistic women to tragic victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. These characters' coercion into working as prostitutes symbolizes the pinnacle of gender-based exploitation and exposes the dark side of migration, particularly the possibility of using



gender vulnerability as a means of exerting power over the two characters 9El Saadawi 2015. P. 46-47).

Both El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015), and McCormick's *Sold* (2006), highlight the profound psychological distress inherent in instances of gender-based exploitation, with internal conflict, perplexity, and emotional trauma serving as a poignant factor for vulnerable migration. This is attested to in the words of Firdaus when she is forced to flee once again from a narcissistic relationship. As I ran, I looked back over my shoulder now and again to make sure that Bayoumi was not following me...: (El-Saadawi 2015. P.68) Harsh realities such as being faced by Firdaus have served as the push for many individuals to seek refuge and freedom in foreign lands. However, many of them have to endure unbearable suffering and risk to their lives in the hope of escaping the cycle of abuse and discrimination that confines them. The power dynamics shown in the book serve as a symbolic representation of the enduring gender inequities prevalent worldwide. The exploitation of young girls due to economic vulnerabilities and societal norms is a poignant and pervasive theme in the selected texts. Both works shed light on the complex web of factors that contribute to the victimisation of young girls, revealing the intersection of gender, economics, and societal norms.

The experiences of Firdaus and Lakshmi in the selected novels provide insight into the emotional aftermath of exploitation in the lives of Firdaus and Lakshmi. The narrative structure and point of view are essential elements of how psychological trauma is exposed, allowing readers to access Firdaus' innermost thoughts and emotions, making her psychological trauma palpable and intimate. El Saadawi employs a nonlinear narrative structure to highlight the fragmented nature of Firdaus' memory and psychological state, mirroring her fractured sense of self and the traumatic events that shaped her life.

In *Sold* (2006), McCormick employs a first-person, diary-like format to engross readers in the traumatic experiences of Lakshmi. The diary entries detail her daily life in a brothel and reflect her inner thoughts, hopes, and fears. This narrative style gives voice to Lakshmi's trauma and provides an unfiltered view of her psychological struggles.

In the same way, the use of poetic language and vivid imagery in the novel amplifies the emotional impact of Lakshmi's trauma, making it impossible for readers to distance themselves from her pain. McCormick skillfully employs language to make the reader share in the emotional intensity of the trauma, underscoring how migration plunged Lakshmi into a nightmarish world of exploitation.

In both novels, trauma is portrayed as a lived experience that shapes the protagonists' identities and influences their actions. Firdaus and Lakshmi are complex individuals who respond to their trauma in different ways, reflecting the resilience and strength of survivors. These narratives go beyond mere depictions of suffering; they invite readers to empathise with the characters' experiences and contemplate the far-reaching consequences of migration and human slavery on the human psyche.

El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2015) and McCormick's *Sold* (2006) employ narratology and a focus on trauma as a lived experience to expose the profound psychological trauma endured by their protagonists. Through narrative structure, point of view, language, and vivid imagery, these texts make the psychological consequences of migration and human slavery palpable and emotionally resonant. They serve as powerful testimonials to the enduring impact of trauma and the urgent need for awareness and action to address these critical issues.

In moments of crisis, one of the ways an individual seeks to survive the trauma of hardship or uncertainties caused by an unpleasant event is by coping with the situation while being resilient. Coping and resilience are well-recognised and intricately interconnected within the

field of psychology. In *Woman at Point Zero* (2016), Firdaus, the main character, employs a variety of coping mechanisms to navigate her journey from rural Egypt to a life of prostitution and exploitation in Cairo.

However, as the narrative progresses, Firdaus transforms. Her decision to kill her exploitative pimp represents a radical shift in her coping strategy, moving from passive endurance to a form of empowerment. Her refusal to conform to societal norms that perpetuate her vulnerability can be seen as a manifestation of her refusal to conform to societal norms. In *Sold* (2006), the character of Lakshmi, a young Nepali girl who is trafficked, under the guise of economic migration, into a brothel in India, exhibits a different set of coping mechanisms and a lack thereof. Initially, she clings to hope, optimism, and her dreams of a better life as her primary coping mechanisms. These fantasies provide her with a sense of agency and psychological relief from the harsh realities of her existence. Lakshmi's ability to imagine a brighter future, even in the darkest of circumstances, underscores the resilience of the human spirit. However, as Lakshmi's situation becomes increasingly dire, her coping mechanisms start to crumble. She confronts the grim reality of her life as a sexual slave and realizes that her dreams are unlikely to materialise. Her sense of helplessness and the loss of her coping mechanisms leave her vulnerable to despair and emotional turmoil. This transition highlights the fragility of coping mechanisms in the face of extreme trauma and exploitation.

Both novels underscore the complexities of coping mechanisms in the context of migration and modern slavery. Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero* evolves from passive endurance to a defiant act of agency, challenging the societal norms that perpetuate her vulnerability. Lakshmi in *Sold* clings to hope and optimism until the unbearable realities of her life erode these coping mechanisms. These stories emphasise the resilience and vulnerability of individuals caught in the web of migration and modern slavery, shedding light on the psychological toll of these experiences.

McCormick's *Sold*, in looking at the issue of migration and human trafficking exposes the dark side of migration and human trafficking by delving into the multifaceted aspects of child exploitation, the vulnerabilities of migrant children, the methods of coercion employed by traffickers, and the resilience of the young protagonist, Lakshmi. McCormick's powerful narrative serves as a poignant lens through which to examine the harsh realities of child trafficking, while also drawing attention to the need for increased awareness and action.

It is also noteworthy that economic migration underscores the vulnerability of migrant women and children, like Lakshmi, who are easily targeted by traffickers due to their socioeconomic backgrounds. Lakshmi's family, struggling with poverty, is deceived into believing that she will have an opportunity for a better life in the city. This vulnerability of impoverished families is not unique to the novel but is a common theme in real-world trafficking situations where a lot of people migrate from their home country to another place in the hope of the golden fleece which most often proves illusory. 'At first, I am not so afraid, because I am going to the city. A better place.' (McCormick, 2006, p. 15). This passage highlights Lakshmi's initial optimism and her family's aspiration for a brighter future, which tragically results in her exploitation which, however, dissipates too quickly.

In other cases, some people are coerced and deceived by traffickers who most often come in the guise of loved ones or family members or friends, into leaving their homes and getting into the trap of human trafficking and modern slavery. Lakshmi is initially deceived by an older woman she trusts and is later sold by her stepfather, a heartbreaking example of familial betrayal. 'I thought I was coming to the city to work as a maid. To earn money for my family' (McCormick, 2006, p. 49). This exemplifies how false promises and manipulation are integral to the trafficking process. Lakshmi's migration from her village in Nepal to a brothel

in India also highlights a harrowing portrayal of the long and perilous routes that traffickers use. Her journey illuminates the clandestine nature of these trafficking networks. "The jeep stops outside a building with no windows. There are so many people inside that I cannot see the walls" (McCormick, 2006, p. 85). The author's vivid description emphasises the oppressive and hidden nature of the brothel.

Another effect of migration, human trafficking, and contemporary slavery on the degradation of culture and social dynamics within diasporic communities is shown in Nawal El-Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (2016) and Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006). Both literary works provide profound perspectives on the lives of people who have endured these distressing conditions, and the extensive implications on their cultural and social identities.

The study's focus on the portrayal of isolation, and particularly, cultural identity loss, and marginalisation within the narratives, allows for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences endured by the migrants. This shows that migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery are interrelated phenomena that have significant implications for both people and the communities to which they belong.

Lomax, Wohland, Rees and Norman (2020), reveal that the impact of migration scenarios on ethnic groups varies based on the degree to which international migration contributes to population increase and the level of demographic momentum. Putting it more succinctly, Bhugra & Becker, (2005), posit that individuals who migrate endure many challenges that might impair their mental well-being, including the loss of cultural norms, religious practices, and social support networks, adjustment to a new culture and changes in identity and idea of self. This reinforces the claim that migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery may lead to cultural identity erosion.

In the novel *Woman at Point Zero* (2016) Firdaus experiences a detachment from her cultural identity as she gets entangled in a repetitive pattern of exploitation. She also experiences a state of isolation due to her incarceration and impending capital punishment, hence shedding attention on the profound isolation endured by those victimised by human trafficking. Similarly, in the book *Sold* (2006) Lakshmi finds herself alienated from her Nepali culture and customs as she confronts the harsh realities of modern slavery. Also, Lakshmi finds herself locked inside a foreign brothel, leading to Lakshmi's isolation from her family and society. Lakshmi's separation not only deprives her of social support but also hinders her ability to communicate and share her experiences.

## **8. Conclusion**

This exploration, through the lens of Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* and Patricia McCormick's *Sold*, exposes the brutal realities of gendered vulnerabilities within migration, human trafficking, and modern slavery. These novels function as powerful instruments for change, urging policy reform and highlighting the urgent need to address the intricate web of gender, migration, and exploitation.

The analysis, informed by feminist and postcolonial perspectives, deepens our understanding of these issues. Both narratives demonstrate how socio-economic migration from developing nations exposes individuals, particularly women and girls, to heightened risks of objectification and sexual exploitation. They depict the harsh realities faced by those seeking a better life, only to become victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse. This connection between migration and exploitation is starkly exposed.

Furthermore, both novels illuminate the role of social injustice and inequality in perpetuating migrant enslavement. Systemic issues are exposed, revealing how poverty and economic

hardship drive the migration of Firdaus and Lakshmi, only to trap them in exploitative cycles. Their experiences expose the fallacy of seeking better opportunities abroad, highlighting how vulnerable migrants often encounter inhumane working conditions due to insensitive migration policies.

The narratives emphasize the lack of legal safeguards and the unique challenges faced by women and girls in migrant communities. Undocumented migrants are particularly susceptible to abuse from traffickers. Limited access to education and social support networks further exacerbates vulnerability. The absence of a cohesive community or safety nets leaves migrants defenceless against exploitation. By capturing the personal journeys of the protagonists, these literary works offer profound insights. Sold, for instance, fosters empathy by immersing readers in Lakshmi's perspective, raising awareness about the horrors of trafficking and dismantling negative stereotypes. These complex and emotionally charged narratives encourage readers to confront the challenges faced by survivors, ultimately enriching our comprehension of these critical issues. Consequently, they contribute significantly to current knowledge in this field.

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