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DISPLACEMENT AND EMBODIMENT OF FEAR FOR SURVIVAL OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET*

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Abstract
*On **Black Sisters'** Street portrays the decision to go into sex work as stemming from more than naiveté and trickery. Nigeria as an economy failing its graduates, women and families creates conditions that allow for a man like Dele to flourish selling the bodies of women not protected by a wealthy home or progressive career prospects. The aim of this study is to show the various constraints the African governments and society impose on women even in the 21st century pushing them to get away from tyranny and subjugation only to find themselves ensnared in exploitation through traffic networks. I use a predominantly black feminist epistemology to consider the intersections of poverty, gender, and sexuality and how these inform an understanding of women's pain. The article argues that while the female characters are defenceless, they retain a dreamy attitude contained within their ability to survive and remain resilient in the face of atrocities for migrants. Chika Unigwe uses narrative to provoke moral and political action and asks for a more nuanced understanding of the conditions in which her protagonists exist. Such a nuanced reading, offers an opportunity for deep reflection on the complexity of human lives in conditions of precarious existence.*

Keywords: Naiveté, Trickery, Traffic network, Nigeria, 21st Century

Introduction

The 21st (twenty-first) century is the current century of the *Anno Domini* era or Common Era, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. It began, according to usno. navy mil on January 1, 2001 and ends on December 31, 2100. It is the first century of the 3rd millennium. It is also defined as an era we are in now, a time of freedom and technological advancement. David Lake has it that the beginning of the 21st century has been marked by

the rise of a global economy and Third World consumerism, deepening global concern over terrorism and an increase in private enterprise. With the proliferation of mobile devices, more than half of the world's population going with the 2018 estimate, obtained access to the internet. After the success of the Human Genome Project, Molteni Megan said DNA sequencing services became available and affordable. On the issue of the African woman, Kathleen Sheldon has written a history of the African continent, the world's second largest, with an emphasis on its women. Affiliated with the UCLA Centre for the Study of Women, she argues that the history of African women is a vital and successful field of intellectual study, which has grown "from a small number of books and articles published in the 1960s and 1970s to the now thriving research that covers a huge range of places, times, and topics that has been achieved in the twenty-first century" (xi). Historically, women have always been represented as submissive creatures. The African society is built on a gender hierarchy that gives birth to what is known as "patriarchy". In visual arts, for example, although women are regarded as sources of inspiration, their representation is crucial. Women as damsels in distress or virtuous wives in paintings and sculptures appear absent and gazing at something distant; only their bodies are highlighted. In African visual arts, women are very often represented as potters or mothers carrying children. Arts, as Lisa Aronson explains in "African Women in the Visual Arts" (1991), "offer a window for viewing the cultural construction of gender" (550) and inform us about the roles of women in different fields like economy, politics, religion, and society. Sheldon also explains in her book *African Women: Early History to the 21st Century*, problems that she encountered in two distinct areas that prompted her to think about writing the book, "many textbooks on the history of Africa had neglected and marginalized the continent's women, who were "nearly absent in some books, and when they are included, it is often in very limited and passive roles" (xi).

Over the years especially in the canon by male writers like Shakespeare, the fiction of Charles Dickens or the early works of Chinua Achebe, female writers were always portrayed as inferior and passive to their male counterparts. Therefore, having had enough of their silenced past and imposed behaviour taken for granted, women have raised their voices against those who have considered their silence for passivity and ignorance and exploited them. Feeling responsible and dutiful to voice their own gender discrimination, many Nigerian intellectuals, activists, and female writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Tess Onwueme, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Amma Darko, Ifeoma Okoye, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe, and Sefi Atta are determined to rehabilitate the image of women in African literature. These writers according to Di Yanni, ensure that they are not only the "products and chroniclers of their eras" (xxxvi), but they also focus on the "location, consciousness and reality of the female in her society" Through their literary output, women writers involve and evolve in the same path rendering "the women question" their central interest of writing. Among the most successful 21st century female writers is Chika Unigwe with her award- winning novel *On Black Sisters' Street*, which portrays the complexities of human relationships and complexities of life in general. She made a turning point from themes of the older generation of female writers to plunge into the theme of sex slavery as a form of trafficking in women and children as a result of the writers being faced with new circumstances, new situations and new technologies. The

novel also reveals how messy it gets when we try to divide things neatly into two different boxes with no room for nuances. *On Black Sisters' Street*, therefore, as a cultural form Said quoted in Hale exposes "the modern reality of the nation-state" (656) as it foregrounds opines Fenser the rat-race of survival by "those imprisoned in the lower depths of society" (92). She opens up again the unhealed and unhealable wound inflicted by slavery and the dysfunctional state that have shamed the black race and the entire humanity.

The choice of corpus in the present research is not fortuitous. First, it focuses on the impartiality African women experience finding themselves stuck between tradition and modernity. Finally, it tackles a theme that is new to the global literature, which is women's exploited sexuality through trafficking. A theme that is very essential in twenty first century literature. *The United Nations Trafficking in Persons Report: June 2018* describes Human

Trafficking as a crime that is 'hidden in plain sight' because victims may interact with others in the community but are unlikely to self-identity for many reasons (9). Human trafficking is, in essence, about supply and demand, an essential aspect of what was termed according to Paola Monzini, "the white slave trade"(3) in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. In the novel for consideration in this article, the researcher reads trafficking as moving beyond mere smuggling (aiding a person across an international border for a fee) to include the sustained exploitative relationship that ensues once the person trafficked crosses the border. That relationship is one of power, with the trafficked person becoming dependent on the trafficker for their wellbeing and livelihood. The exploitative relationship is also often one in which the trafficked person has no clear means of escape or ability to return home (place of origin). The trafficked is therefore displaced and live in total fear for survival . Among several tactics, the trafficker often holds the trafficked person hostage, requiring a form of payment, usually a large sum of money. The trafficker will also often hold on to the trafficked person's documentation, such as a passport, to prevent the trafficked person from leaving. Given that the trafficked person is a source of income for those who benefit from their labour, a desire by the trafficked person to leave might elicit some form of response from the trafficker, including punishment and, sometimes, even murder. This state of vulnerability is used against the girls in the novel. We get to know the fate of the four room-mates through Sisi when Madam tells her: "all you need to know is that you're persona non grata in this country. You do not exist. Not here' " (182). This is what Madam tells Sisi when she comes back from the Ministry of External Affairs where she tells a fake story to an agent about her being in Belgium. Madam continues her insults towards Sisi by looking at her like a commodity, "now you belong to me. It cost us a lot of money to organize all this for you " (182). By the "you" I think she addresses not only Sisi, but also Efe, Ama, and Joyce. She later adds: "Now, until you have paid up every single kobo'. . . 'Every single cent of what you owe us, you will not have your passport back" (182-83). Accordingly, the researcher's aim in this study is to show the various constraints the African governments and society impose on women even in the 21st century pushing them to get away from tyranny and subjugation only to find themselves ensnared in exploitation through traffic networks. The absurdities of life in Nigeria are expertly captured. Lagos is filth and dust at dusk advertising the meanness of neglect. A man called Dele, who promises the girls a life of plenty, lures them in Unigwe's novel, Sisi, Ama, Efe,

and Joyce, to Europe. While three of them (except Joyce) go to Europe willingly, they are hopeful for a dream that will take them away from the squalor and indignity of their respective present existence. In each case, the violence of poverty and sexual attacks, as well as the sheer dominance of patriarchal power, define the past contexts from which they come. Travelling to Europe, rather than alleviate the violence, brings it into sharp focus. From the isolated existence that these foreign bodies are thrown into, to physical harm, to the quiet threat of Madam, Dele, and Segun who want their cut in the trafficking trade, these women seem to be unable to imagine alternative presents and possibilities for other lives. Indeed, when Dele orders the murder of Sisi, it is to make his mark as the puppet master and to remind those who work for him to never cross him. In this extreme context, what does survival and resilience look like?

Review of Literature

Literature on displacement and violence against women and children suggests in the words of Watts and Zimmerman that, "it occurs principally because of the subordinated positions of the victims (1232). Violence renders bodies defenceless and open to abuse. The sheer ability to survive and continue to live, in full recognition of what the trauma means on one's body, is extremely important. Feminist scholarship encourages a culture of naming and exploring the pain and violence as a form of public therapy. The works of black feminists such as Bell Hooks (*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) and *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, (1994)); Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought* (1990)); and Pumla Gqola (*Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015) and *Reflecting Rogue: Inside the Mind of a Feminist* (2017)), to name a few, give us vocabulary for thinking about alternative epistemologies which encourages new formulations for thinking about knowledge. Using Black feminist phenomenology, the study, engage with the context in which violence, corruption and neglect shape the lives of the characters in the novel that is under consideration.

Human trafficking is a topic many writers from the affected countries write about recently. In African literature, many writers deal with transatlantic trafficking. For instance, there is Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale* (2006), Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and others who dramatize sexual exploitation and dehumanization of African people. The novels of Ezeigbo and Unigwe expose the same theme: human trafficking in Nigeria. It is worth noting that there are many common points between the protagonists of Unigwe and the ones of Ezeigbo. Both writers have a character named Efe. In addition to that, the protagonists of the two novels are forced prostitutes trafficked by a pimp to a Madam abroad, and both novels have characters who suffer from lack of job opportunities despite their university degrees. These characters are Sisi who is strongly encouraged by her father in her education (*On Black Sisters' Street*) and Nneoma and Alice (*Trafficked*). In spite of being a newcomer to the world of literature, Chika Unigwe's novel *On Black Sisters' Street* has been studied by different scholars and writers from different perspectives. The present study's contribution to scholarship is an in depth exploration of the Nigerian society and the outcomes of these circumstances leading the girls to be victims of modern day slavery. Modern-day slavery goes beyond race, gender, and ethnicity. It resembles the old slavery in its nature and conditions of the life of the victim. Apart from

Chika Unigwe, there are many writers who write about this new form of slavery like Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Siddharth Kara's *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (2009), and *God in a Brothel: An Undercover Journey into Sex Trafficking and Rescue* (2011) to name a few. Sex trafficking is an international trade that consists in selling people either within their country borders or across the borders crossing oceans and seas as Kelsey Bishop explains it in her article "Human Trafficking: A Thematic Analysis of New York Times Coverage" (118). In fact, it is much larger and more developed than the old form of slavery. Oyeh O. Otu's article titled "Prostitution: The Economics of Sex and Power Dynamics in El Saadawi's *Women At Point Zero*, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*" (2016), discusses the position of African feminist writers and the conditions of women being treated as objects of pleasure with their sexuality commoditized starting from marriage (8-9). The researcher concludes that prostitution destroys the protagonists' dreams and aspirations instead of giving them the economic freedom they expected (13). The present study agrees with the writer in the point that the quest for economic power nonexistent for the poor is the primary attraction of her protagonists to prostitution forgetting about their honour, dignity, and pride. Patricia Bastida-Rodriguez's article titled "The Invisible Flâneuse: European Cities and the African Sex Worker in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*" (2014), deals with the intersections between the protagonists' use of urban space, their social status as prostitutes, and the emotions circulating about them in the city. The author of the article describes the text as a pioneering text in the contemporary literary scene because it sheds lights on the minorities in Belgium and undertakes the inscription of sex-trafficked women that European literature has neglected (204). For the scholar, Belgium as a "global city" is linked to the experience of the girls (204). In fact, being trafficked prostitutes annuls their participation in social sphere because they are not allowed to leave their business areas even if prostitution is legal. So for the scholar, the private, domestic, and public spheres in the novel are represented in two spaces: the flat where the girls live and their window booths where they work (206-7). Bastida-Rodriguez concludes claiming that the novel makes evident the social invisibility of contemporary sex workers in Europe through, mainly Sisi, the invisible flâneuse, because of her profession and her status as illegal immigrant.

Displacement: the Trafficked Body

The story centres around four women who are sex workers in Belgium. In an all too familiar story, the women leave their native Africa for a "better life," only to end up in Belgium, working in the red light district. Like indentured servants, they are at the mercy of their benefactor pimp and Madame for years in order to pay their debt and win their freedom. The story centres on the murder of one of the women while interweaving the lives of the others and the hopelessness that led them to their current circumstances. Unigwe, who was born in Nigeria, now lives in Belgium. In a rich mix of schoolmarm British and pidgin English, spiked with smatterings of Igbo and Yoruba, she tells the stories of four African sex workers sharing an apartment in Antwerp's red-light district. But it is only when Sisi, the rebel among them, is murdered, that her three housemates emerge from their self-protective anonymity to share their family histories. The person who has brought these

women together, is Dele, a "big man" back in Lagos whose wealth comes from selling African women to Western European brothels:

> Every month I send gals to Europe. Antwerp. Milan. Madrid. My gals dey there. Every month, four gals. Sometimes five or more," he boasts to Sisi when she first visits his office. "You be fine gal now. Abi, see your backside, kai! Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest nyansh? . . . As for those melons wey you carry for chest, omo, how you no go fin' work? (45)

Dele's offer is brutally upfront: the fee he charges his "gals" for spiriting them into the longed-for West is 30,000 Euros, a debt that combined with the rent they will owe "Madam," will take many years to repay. Yet each of these four women accepts Dele's hard bargain, simply because their alternatives are worse. Ama, raised in a middle-class milieu in which ladies debate the respective merits of houseboys versus serving maids, has been kicked out of her home for revealing that her saintly seeming stepfather, assistant pastor at the Church of the Twelve Apostles of the Almighty Yahweh, had been raping her since she was 8 years old. It is as much a revolt against human hypocrisy as material need that drives Ama to become one of those lewd women the pastor likes to curse from the pulpit. Efe, who at 16 was knocked up by the local hair-weave merchant, goes abroad so she can support not only her baby but the three siblings who depend on her. Determined to give her beloved son a better life, Efe aims to amass enough money to open a whorehouse of her own one day. The woman, who calls herself Joyce, in fact born Alek, is a Sudanese refugee who was gang-raped as a child by the janjaweed militia and witnessed the massacre of her family. Alek has been coaxed into prostitution by Polycarp, the Nigerian peacekeeper she had hoped to marry. It's a testament to Unigwe's ability to convey human complexity that Polycarp, to ease his conscience at having jilted her, is paying off her debt to Dele, an anomaly that gives her unique privileges in the brothel hierarchy. The dead Sisi, however, is the woman whose story is in some ways the most wrenching. Hers is a tale not of incest, rape or genocide but of the accumulated disappointments that can grind even the most determined soul into defeat. In the scattered chapters revealing the events that lead to Sisi's murder, we learn how her father, a bright and ambitious village boy, was obliged by his parents to give up his studies and become a lowly clerk in order to help his nine younger siblings through school, "I had bookhead, *isi akwukwo.* I could have been a doctor. Or an engineer. I could have been a *big* man," (19) Sisi's father fumes. Education is everything, her parents teach the girl. "Face your books, and the sky will be your limit" (18). They placed all their hopes in their only daughter, whose brilliant academic career will surely win her an important job. Together the family members dream, laugh and squabble about the kind of company car and driver Sisi will have; the sort of big house she will live in, with a high-walled garden.

It must be reminded that Nigerian literature sees light in the 18th century with the first slave narratives by writers like Phyllis Wheatly, Olauda Equiano and others. According to Ezechi Onyerionwu, in his article, "New Nigerian 'Transatlantic' Novel and Sex Trade Narrative in Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale",* like this African American literature, the African European literature begins with a slave trade, a 21st century form of slavery that he describes as conscious, "the African now consciously wants to be enslaved" (*The Guardian,* 2016) because they want to flee their countries no matter what. He says that due to the socioeconomic and political crisis Africa suffers from, the continent remains

dependent on America and Europe, this is what pushes many Africans to leave their countries and migrate to the North giving another image of the transatlantic trade. According to the author, America and Europe are the lands where many dreams can be fulfilled; even if some slavery is in the plan, it is better than the disillusionment and the misery of Africa. *On Black Sisters' Street* is a book unapologetically laden with emotion. Wanting to go beyond a mere recounting of statistical fact, the author chooses narrative, through which she explores and exploits the emotional milieu, in order to obtain the most possible reaction from her readers.

To draw the reader in, Unigwe begins by mapping out the violent context of Sisi's background. This importantly provokes the shape that Europe takes later on in the novel. Rather than presenting it as a clear-cut safe haven away from the violence and negligence of Nigeria, the author builds up a narrative that prepares the reader for the harrowing reality the four women find themselves in when they travelled from Africa to Antwerp. Despite her novelty in the field, Chika Unigwe has been able to mark her presence and show her talent by raising her voice to unveil topics that have been ignored despite their old existence such as human trafficking, women's oppression, loneliness, alienation, corruption and so on.

Sisi is a university graduate with a business degree whose dreams of becoming rich and helping her parents out of poverty is thwarted by political corruption in Nigeria. According to her, Nigeria is not a place from which to dream. She has the responsibility of looking after her parents, who make it clear that she is their last hope to live a decent life. Her lover, Peter, a clerk in a government office, is burdened with taking care of all his siblings, as well as his parents. The weight of it all is too much for Sisi and, as she puts it, "Peter's life was a cul-de-sac" (27). Leaving Lagos is, for her, a form of escape from being stuck. When Sisi meets a young woman at a salon, she is excited to find out that she can leave for Europe and earn a living there. Dele, the man in charge of the young woman, immediately offers Sisi an opportunity. Adeleye claims in his study that "research has indicated that location and environment are key factors to consider in the sustenance and spread of trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation" (27). She says that many of the traffickers are skilled in detecting and approaching the most vulnerable females, being it out of poverty, social isolation, or suffering from physical and domestic violence (27). Dele, for example, in *On Black Sisters' Street* targets Sisi in a hair dressing salon where she speaks to Dele's already victim about going abroad. She seems to him needy so he takes the chance to say: "I dey get girls everywhere. Italy, Spain. I fit get you inside Belgium –Antwerp. I get plenty connections there. Plenty. Plenty!" (34). In this quote not only does Dele try to seduce Sisi and attract her to trafficking, but he also makes reference to the power of money and corruption, as well as the universality of sex trafficking especially when he adds " 'Ah, to be big man no easy at all"(34). Though suspicious, Sisi sees this as her only opportunity out of feeling stuck in Lagos. Europe becomes her future.

Like Sisi, Efe sees Europe as a haven for multiple freedoms. Having fallen pregnant at the age of sixteen, Efe imagines Europe as offering her a second chance at life. Efe's mother dies and her father spirals into alcoholism, leaving her to act as parent to her siblings. She soon develops a relationship with a rich older man, Titus, to help supplement the little

money she gets from her father. She falls pregnant and Titus abandons her and the child. Efe drops out of school to tend to her family and to take care of her son, all the while being shunned by her neighbours. She meets Dele when he offers her a cleaning job at his firm. Not long after, he asks her to travel to Belgium, "Next door to London" (81), and she agrees. As Monzini has shown, women who sometimes find themselves in conditions of slavery are lured into it because of extreme poverty. Once again, Nigeria is painted as a hopeless place, where only people with money have control. Belgium is where she would earn "easy money" (84).

While Sisi's and Efe's contexts offer an opportunity to think about questions of poverty, dignity, and a refusal to settle for a life of hopelessness, Ama and Joyce have much more violent pasts. Ama is a rape survivor, having been raped by her stepfather from the ages of eight to thirteen. Her stepfather is a respected pastor whose rigid religious routines stand in contrast with his violent behaviour towards a little child. He only stops the rape when she begins having her period, in a way erasing the possibility of detecting his violence. As a child, Ama wills her mother to see her pain and confusion, but her mother refuses. Much like Firdaus's mother in El Sadaawi's *Woman at Point Zero* there is a possibility that her mother is aware of the abuse but chooses not to confront her husband for fear of losing her home. Unigwe presents this scenario as both violent and ordinary. Ama's life is tainted because of something that should not have happened. Yet, her mother's reaction is a reminder of how much this remains a part of everyday reality in Africa. Indeed, she blames her daughter for stirring trouble and is quick to help find an alternative home for her in the city. Ama's life is in essence one that she wishes she could escape. She desires a new future, and given her background, Europe presents an opportunity.

Joyce, like Ama, is also a victim of atrocious violence. At the age of fifteen, Joyce and her family are caught in a civil war in which *Janjaweed* militia murders them in front of her. She is gang raped and left unconscious. However, she makes her way to a refugee camp where she meets and falls in love with a Nigerian soldier, Polycarp. Being Sudanese, Joyce is aware of her foreignness, but hangs on to the love she has for Polycarp as a way of healing herself from her past. Polycarp's family is, however, extremely xenophobic and unwelcoming. As a solution, Polycarp introduces Joyce to Dele, promising her a new start in Europe as a well-paid nanny. Joyce leaves for Belgium and feels completely betrayed by Polycarp when she finds out what she is meant to actually do in Belgium. Later in the novel, she reflects on this betrayal as possibly the worst in her life. Considering everything else she has been through, this sense of betrayal seems acute.

Poverty and violence, therefore, form the basis from which all four women find themselves in Europe. The women travel because of the hopelessness of their current contexts. Without a doubt, all four women hope for a better life. However, none of them are in control of their own bodies, exposing them to all forms of injustice. The hyper-patriarchal setup of these women's violent background is also a way for the reader to consume their story.

Dream of the West: Illusion and Annihilation

Antwerp presents as a cramped reality through the eyes of the characters in the novel under review. The claustrophobic sensation is born out of how these women experience Europe

from small rooms, airports, and booths. Their airport experience en route Belgium is one of curious wonder laced with fear. Despite the unsavoury nature of their homes, Nigeria is familiar to them, while Europe presents as an unknown future. Their attitude towards Europe is therefore tentative. The theme of the fragile and unprotected shapes the novel. The researcher argues that the treatment, while harsh, is not out of script with the manner in which trafficked bodies are already pre-conceived. Monzini engages extensively with the formula used by traffickers to create human slaves. Because the human body inherently rejects the possibility of being forced into action, it has to be broken. Sisi, Unigwe's protagonist for instance, panicking about paying Dele back, forces herself to deal with the pain of having sex with strangers. In fact Sisi, in my opinion is raped by her first client because when the man is about to have sex with her, she tries to stop him, "she tried to wriggle out of his embrace. She did not want to do this anymore. 'I don't need this. Stop!' she said" (212). She shouts again and again "stop", but the man ignores her complaints "inaugurating Sisi into her new profession. And she baptized herself into it with tears" (213). She resolves to never allow herself to feel the pain again and prepares herself mentally to withstand the experiences.

Character Exploration Embedded on Narratives

In her analysis of *On Black Sisters' Street*, Daria Tunca categorizes the narrative's characters as both subjected to their condition, but also agentic. She discusses the task of balancing the narrative between the two positions and comments on how the author, using narrative fragmentation, achieves a nuanced engagement with human trafficking. Narrative, as Tunca argues, enables exploration of humanity and its many complexities. It is from this location that one can rethink fear as a trope in the novel. Feminist theorists identify fear in the words of Erinn Gilson as "a feminized concept associated with weakness and dependency" (71). Through direct engagement with human trafficking as it circulates in public, feminists can begin the work of dismantling power structures that sustain the act. This is what I call social justice. The (trafficked) subject is not merely a tool for research, but a call to action. In a similar vein, I find the work of Saidiya Hartman useful in this regard. Hartman argues that the focus on the violence of slavery as spectacular is not helpful. I find, in the book under study, a need to name and engage with the violence, not as spectacular but as part of the systemic violence that shapes it. Exploring incidences of narrative rupture occurs when we catch glimpses of characters' thoughts, fantasies, wishes, feelings, and other affects. The novelist, for instance, invites the reader to envision the moment of pain when Ama is raped by her stepfather, her innocence as a child is juxtaposed against the violence enacted on her. The reader is presented with the violent moment through Ama's responses to the pain. She takes to speaking to an imaginary friend and to finding a way to protect herself from the horrors of the experience. Merely eight years old, she does not fully comprehend what has happened to her. She, however, is clear on the rules. She does not tell. However, through narrative, we are privy to this moment of intense pain, and her response to that pain allows us insight into the impossibility of that moment. Here, we are placed in close quarters with the perpetrator of the violence and are able to engage with what that violence means to the child. In Joyce's case, her response to her family being murdered is to lash out. However, this is short-lived as the men jeeringly rape her as a way of showing her her place. She turns into herself at that moment, refusing

to engage with those around her, learning new ways of being human in these extreme conditions. Polycarp becomes one avenue through which she rediscovers herself; an avenue that she discovers is unstable. Pain becomes an avenue through which the characters can re-think their existence. Indeed, it is from a place of pain that Sisi develops an ability to dream. In Belgium, for instance, she goes on long walks, pretending to be a rich tourist from elsewhere and imagining a life that continues to elude her. These trips reassure her of her humanity and give her a chance to recoup her lost dignity. When she discovers that Segun, the house handyman, had overheard her pretend to be a tourist on one occasion, she is so embarrassed that she cannot speak of the incident with the other women. These dreams of hers are also a source of hope for a better life.

Within the context I have painted above, what does it take to refuse to remain scared? In her chapter, "Unmaking vulnerability," Sarah Hagelin remarks that patriarchal culture teaches women and children's bodies to remain scared in order to avoid injury. Interestingly, the human body suffers pain, regardless of what body it is: male or female. What is it that gives men the courage to experience pain but not women? To be weak or defenceless means to remain compliant to a system that purports to protect. However, what if that system is the one that causes the pain in the first place? The novel as far the researcher is concerned was not written to please, but to disturb. Reading about prostitution and the stories behind different prostitutes has been there for ages. However, this book is different. The message behind this story is different. This time, I am left with a lot of unanswered questions. Is this really an escape for prostitution or are they bound to do this job? If femininity is according to Hagelin "a system of beliefs, images and narratives that imply a capacity to be harmed" (3), how can we think around it to find and understand ways in which the female body continues to survive? For her, to live (continue to breathe) becomes an act of refusal.

The authors' ability to evoke feelings of helplessness, disgust, confusion, terror, horror, and pain is precisely the key to understanding the forms of social action they intend to provoke. In a section on women and dignity, Chielozona Eze argues that the characters in Unigwe's novel make political and moral demands on readers. For Eze, it is important to pay attention to the manner in which the characters attempt to recoup their dignity. Through Sisi, this is achieved through the way in which the narrative centres on her pain, while at the same time, weaving in her hopes and dreams. For Eze, Sisi embodies a "yearning for a world in which people treat one another in dignity" (97). The narratives, though offering glimpses of hope, also show the hopelessness of the lives of sex slaves in Europe. This is actually what happens with Sisi, Efe, Joyce, and Ama. In a conversation between Joyce, Ama, and Efe, Joyce confesses that she is not happy, "and are we happy?' Joyce challenges" (114) then Efe answers saying: "me, I try not to think about happiness. L.I. is getting a good education. Dat one suppose dey enough for me" and she adds on later: "sometimes I think my life is like a set of false teeth. The world sees what you show it: *clean teet' wey white like Colgate but you know for inside day you real teet' don rot finish!*" (114). Then Ama tells Joyce "'you might not have asked for this, but this is what you get" (241). And she later adds, "we're not happy here. None of us is. We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals' " (290). They know what kind of work

they are to do but they are ignorant of the conditions of the work before arriving to Belgium. Joyce does not know about the work though because Dele plays the typical card of sending her to work in Belgium as a nanny and have good life and earn a lot of money. Dele traps her under pretext of going to be a baby-sitter. The same way many traffickers opt for to attract potential victims. Efe, Ama, and Joyce remain under Dele's employ until their bills are paid. The three women find ways of living their dreams later, but these lives are marked with deep pain and violence.

In conclusion, the study explores the trafficked not just merely to empathize with the victims but as an agency to attack the system that kept it so, signalling the inability of these bodies to be whole, at home or Europe. They are in constant motion, as a way of navigating the violence. Movement to and fro Europe shows a search for stability that is never there. We see this starkly in the concluding chapters of the novel. Sisi is murdered because of her refusal to continue working as a sex slave. Her search for stability leads to her murder. We are told that the other women, Ama, Joyce, and Efe, eventually return to Nigeria, but remain caught up in the industry in many ways. Even Ama, who opens up restaurants and schools for girls, is still marred by her past. To represent the trafficked body means to contend with the constant process of being a migrant, a displaced person, of never quite belonging. It is to be content with finding agency in unfamiliar places and catching glimpses of hope.

Chika Unigwe's approach of enlisting four protagonists – Sisi, Joyce, Ama and Efe - enabled her to break the construct of the single sex-worker narrative. Unigwe asks for a more nuanced understanding of the conditions in which the women exist. Such a nuanced reading, she seems to suggest, offers an opportunity for deep reflection on the complexity of human lives in conditions of precarious existence. Nigeria as an economy failing its graduates, women and families creates conditions like the story under this study. Unigwe also touches on the flexibility of religious beliefs and morality in Nigerian society. Sex trafficking is still very much a reality and all because our African governments refuse to look after the citizens that need them the most. If this research paper demonstrates one thing, it is that patriarchy's and bad governance are analogous and even entwined. Both degrade and oppress women by reducing them into objects. Throughout this research, we have aimed at demonstrating the various social and economic constraints African women face in their societies despite the

contemporariness of time. We have seen that even in Diaspora, Chika Unigwe challenges her contemporaries by writing about women of her race in the country where she dwells. Unigwe in this novel uncovers the repressive socio-economic conditions of her four female protagonists in Nigeria as well as in Belgium as trafficked sex workers. Being from the Third World means that women have restricted possibilities for independence and freedom that the globalized economy can offer to the privileged persons.

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