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**Capitalist Patriarchy and Sexual  
Exploitation in Chika Unigwe's *On Black  
Sisters' Street* (2009)**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for a **Master's degree in  
English Language, Literature, and Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my dear parents who provided me with the faith, trust, education, love, and support throughout my life.

To my whole family, my brother, my sisters, my nieces, and nephews.

To my friends.

To my forever best friends and sisters who supported me and gave me confidence to continue and realize this present work. Thank you Katia, Hylida, Sarra, Randa, and Sabrina for helping me.

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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this research paper is my own work, based on my personal study and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that this work has not previously been submitted in any other university. I am fully aware that if this work contains plagiarized content, this will involve serious consequences.

Name: Sabrina Benkhaled

Date: 07/06/2019

Signature

## Abstract

This work studies Chika Unigwe's novel *On Black Sisters' Street* from a Marxist-feminist perspective. Our main objectives are to show the affiliations between patriarchy and economic systems, and how they both make the conditions of women worse. Because our corpus deals mainly with sex trafficking and depicts the plights of victims of male domination and capitalism in Nigeria and Belgium, our reading invokes the theories of feminism and Marxism.

Keywords: Feminism, patriarchy, capitalist-patriarchy, Marxism, sex-trafficking, African literature, women writers

## Résumé

Ce travail étudie le roman de Chika Unigwe, *On Black Sisters's Street*, à travers l'optique du féminisme marxiste. Nos objectifs principaux sont de montrer les liens entre le patriarcat et les systèmes économiques et comment ils aggravent la situation des femmes. Parce que notre corpus traite principalement de la traite à des fins sexuelles et décrit les souffrances des victimes de la domination masculine et du capitalisme au Nigeria et en Belgique, notre lecture invoque les théories du féminisme et du marxisme.

Mots-clés: féminisme, patriarcat, patriarcat capitaliste, marxisme, traite à des fins sexuelles, littérature africaine, femmes écrivains

## General Introduction

“Nobody will ever win the battle of the sexes.

There’s too much fraternizing with the enemy”

Henry Kissinger

Historically and culturally, women have always been represented as submissive creatures. The 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 Michelangelo’s work, for example, women are portrayed as desexualized human beings or in better terms as masculine women. Michelangelo’s famous frescos *Leda and the Swan*, *Sibilla Libica*, *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* portray women who look more like men. 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.

In literature, female characters are always portrayed as inferior and passive to males mainly in the male-dominated literature like the plays of Shakespeare, the fiction of Charles Dickens or Chinua Achebe. Therefore, having had enough of their silenced past and imposed behavior taken for granted, women have raised their voices against those who have considered their silence for passivity and ignorance and exploited them. It has started first in America and Europe as the “Feminist movement” with its different waves, but after the independence of African countries, the Western feminists are joined by their African counterparts.

Feeling responsible and dutiful to voice their own gender discrimination, many

Nigerian intellectuals, activists, and female writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Unoma Azuah, Chika Unigwe, and Sefi Atta are determined to rehabilitate the image of women in African literature. 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 21<sup>st</sup> century female writers is Chika Unigwe with her more successful novel *On Black Sisters Street* (2009), which portrays the complexities of human relationships and complexities of life in general. The novel also reveals how messy it gets when we try to divide things neatly into two different boxes with no room for nuances.

The choice of corpus in the present research is not fortuitous. First, the novel bears numerous issues that not only Nigerian women, but also African women face in general which are worth mentioning. Second, 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.

Accordingly, our aim in this modest study is to show the various constraints African society imposes on women even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century pushing them to get away from tyranny and subjugation only to find themselves ensnared in exploitation through traffic networks.

In order to conduct this study, we will rely on Marxist-feminism to analyze the novel and explain the oppression and exploitation of women as seen by Juliet Mitchell, Engels and Marx. Then, merging the two theories is indispensable to understand the oppression and exploitation of women putting an emphasis on Zillah Eisenstein’s explanation and Gayatri Spivak’s comments.

The present research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How does patriarchy and capitalism shape the oppression of women?
2. How is human trafficking related to globalized capitalism?

### 3. What are the consequences of human and sex trafficking on women?

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. However, no thorough study of the socio-economic background of the protagonists and a detailed study of the consequences it has on them has been undertaken so far. Therefore, this study will explore the patriarchal Nigerian society and the outcomes of these circumstances leading the girls to be victims of modern day slavery.

Because we cannot review all the works published about our studied novel, we shall only mention the most important and recent ones. In "The Domination and Sexual Objectification of Women in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*" (2017), Amara E. Chukwudi-Ofoedu discusses the cultural, social, and economic driving forces leading to African Women's prostitution through the study of Chika Unigwe's novel. The author starts by pointing out the issue of women's submissiveness as being inherent to African social traditions, given that men are considered as superior in status (1). The past androcentric nature of African literature also contributes to the reification of the African woman, and most importantly, her sexualisation, given that she is portrayed as a passive and subservient character satiating her male counterpart's desires (1-2), this makes her lose her power over herself.

The scholar considers that Belgium represents, for the four African women in the novel, a gateway from the miseries of their home countries, plagued by corruption (3). The author notes that the objectification of the female protagonists is initiated in their own environment by setting the example of Ama, who has been repeatedly raped by her step-father when she was but a child (4). Additionally, prostitution, according to Chukwudi-Ofoedu, is seen by society as a women's business only, and fails to consider the males' control in such a field, given the prejudiced association of sex with women (8). Women's objectification,

therefore, is something passed on from a generation to another, thus making them accept their situation and normalizing it (7). In addition to that, the harsh economic conditions characterizing most African countries lie behind women's sex trafficking (6).

The author Chielozona Eze, in his article entitled “Feminism with a Big ‘F’: Ethics and the Rebirth of African Feminism in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*” (2014), attempts to expound the fundamental endeavors of Unigwe’s novel. The novel, according to the researcher, does not only denounce the appalling dehumanization of women by snatching away their absolute rights and underestimating their positions in the society, but it also reveals the intricacies of their lives by seeing them as tools (92). The researcher reports that the victims of the story are exposed to constant hazardous scourges including rape, corruption, manipulation, and poverty. The ownership of African women’s bodies by the society is compared to the system of slavery.

Another study worth mentioning is Ikenna Kamalu and Blessing O. Ejezie’s article “Ideational Representation of Prostitution and Social Meaning in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*” (2016). The two scholars have studied Unigwe’s use of language to express power and social relations in the Nigerian society and consider word choice and sentence construction to depict the inferior states the girls are in and their ordeal experiences (111-15).

Equally favorable is 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). The author 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). We may agree with the writer in the point that the

quest for economic power is the primary attraction of her protagonists to prostitution forgetting about their honor, dignity, and pride.

Another significant research made about Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* is Patricia Bastida-Rodriguez's article titled "The Invisible Flâneuse: European Cities and the African Sex Worker in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street*" (2014). In this article, the writer 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 (Ibid). 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. The study is significant because it reinforces our arguments.

Mary Theru Wambui's M.A dissertation "Female Identity in the Post-Millennial Nigerian Novel: A Study of Adichie, Atta, and Unigwe" (2015) is another important study of Unigwe's novel. The study is relevant to our research because it gives evidence that the protagonists of Unigwe are objects of consumer desire and desires of consumer objects in Antwerp (96). Unigwe, in Wambui's view, studies the complexities of migration across geographical, political, cultural, economic, and gender borders. The study reveals that the fate of Efe, Sisi, Ama, and Joyce results not from a voluntary chosen agency, but from an

expectation resulting with failure of their ambitions and fetishism for wealth and happiness (102-3). Indeed, they are enthusiastic and excited to leave Belgium thinking that it is a privilege, however it turns out to be their worst nightmare. Unigwe, for Wambui, exhibited the racist discourse of Europeans fueling the continuity of alteration in Third World traditions and exotic bodies that are exploited (108-9). An exoticism, for the scholar, that adds spice to please the white man from one hand, and constitutes the marginalization of the black women as the “Other” from another hand (110). Consequently, the women are cast as objects of the male gaze reducing their identity to their bodies and sexual organs (112). Wambui, however, claims that Unigwe has suggested a change through Sisi’s Belgian boyfriend, and the trial of Sisi to rebel (Ibid). However, the scholar concludes that death has distanced the protagonists even more even if they are from the same country and live in the same flat (115).

Sarah De Mul, is another scholar who deals with Unigwe’s second novel in “Becoming Black in Belgium: The Social Construction of Blackness in Unigwe’s Authorial Self-Representation and *On Black Sisters’ Street*” (2014). She examines Unigwe’s satirical column “Becoming Black in Seven Lessons” (2010) as an authorial self-representation and *On Black Sisters’ Street* to portray the social view of blackness in Europe where race is seen as a social identity (12). According to De Mul, Unigwe in “Becoming Black in Seven Lessons” contends that it is the social opinion that renders someone black or African through their imaginary and stereotypes (13). De Mul asserts that Unigwe’s choice of reveling her protagonists’ life through fictional autobiographies could explain plainly post-colonialism and its relation to subjectivity (19). By voicing their memories and experiences, Unigwe gives an insight into a submerged world of sex trafficking in Belgium being, thus socially constructed through exotic and sexualized codes of black womanhood. De Mul sees the protagonists as agents in transnational world making choices restricted by their circumstances. What is interesting in this study, although it does not refer to capitalism as an oppressive system, is the

way she sees the book as an expression of constructed nature of black womanhood performing highly feminine gender and racial codes to achieve economic purpose and upward social mobility (21).

By altering the concept of identity, Unigwe, according to the scholar, refutes the single-sided ideas about female blackness with which her protagonists are confronted in their booths (22). For De Mul, *On Black Sisters' Street* is a *Bildungsroman* in the girls' stories, in the narrative techniques it contains, and its circular plot (Ibid). To mean that Unigwe uses exclusive techniques that have not been used before to treat a theme that is very delicate. Autobiographies help the protagonists have a sense of belonging, so the novel is, for De Mul a polyphonic collage of individual stories creating a mosaic portrayal that defines the essentialist vision of the exotic African woman (22-23). Ultimately, the women's sense of selfhood evolves as their empathy for each other grows, and as they listen to each other's distinctive stories (24). De Mul concludes that, like Unigwe's writings that transcend the exotic category of Flemish-African writers circulating transnational contexts, the protagonists of *On Black Sisters' Street* also improvise to find spaces to re-describe themselves and start their lives anew amidst the popular European perception as exotic sexualized black woman (24), as if Europe opens more doors ahead for Africans.

The present research work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the author and provides a summary of the novel. It also explains the theory on which our analysis is based, focusing on different theorists like Engels, Juliet Mitchell, Gayatri Spivak, Christine Delphy, and others. The second chapter explores the socio-economic conditions of the protagonists mainly their complete dependence on men, and their oppression by male patriarchs and corrupted economic system. The last chapter studies the consequences of sex-trafficking on the victims through an exhaustive analysis of characters.

## Chapter one:

### Biographical, Literary, and Theoretical Backgrounds

#### 1. A Sketch of the Life and Work of Chika Unigwe

Chika Unigwe, from her real name Amarachika Nina Unigwe was born on June the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1974 in Enugu, Nigeria. She is the sixth of seven children. She studies in secondary school at Federal Government Girls' College in Abuja. After earning a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Nsukka, Nigeria, in 1995, she moves to Belgium to live with her husband in Turnhout, a city in Flanders Belgium. Her husband is a Belgian engineer with whom she has four children. In 1996, she has a Master of Arts at the University of Lauren and pursues her PhD degree that she owns from the University of Leiden in Netherlands in 2004 for her dissertation entitled "In the Shadow of Ala: Igbo Women Writing as an Act of Righting". She lives two years in Seattle USA, then she comes back to Belgium where she continues her writing career and teaches Flemish to immigrants.

Her first published works are collections of poems entitled *Tear Drops* and *Born in Nigeria* (1993) in addition to other non-fictional works. In 2003 she wins the BBC short story competition with her short story "Borrowed Smile" and is nominated for Caine Prize for African Writer in 2004 for her short story "The Secret". Her first fictional novel is *The Phoenix* written originally in English but first published in Flemish in 2005. That would be the case for all her later novels. *De Feniks* is the first fiction book written by a Flemish author from African origin. She is nominated for Women and Culture Debut Prize for best first novel by female writer in 2005. The novel deals with the life of a Nigerian woman who moves to live in Belgium and suffers from weak health, loneliness, and alienation. Chika Unigwe is most known for her second novel published first in Flemish as *Fata Morgana* in 2007. The

English translation is published two years later (2009) as *On Black Sisters' Street*. It deals with the story of four African girls (three Nigerian and one Sudanese) who, due to their disillusionment in Nigeria, are trafficked to the city of Antwerp in Belgium to work in the Red-Light District as prostitutes. In 2012 she publishes *Night Dancer*, a novel that deals with an abused woman and her child. She leaves her abusive husband and works in a night club to save her daughter. Unigwe's latest novel is *The Black Messiah* published in 2013. It deals with the life of a former African American slave, Olaudah Equiano.

*On Black Sisters' Street* is a novel that helps Chika Unigwe win the 2012 NLNG (Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas) prize of literature. After that, she is rated as one of top five African writers by Zukiswa Wanner in *The Guardian*. In 2013 she moves with her family to live in Atlanta, America, where she has a very active life. She is Creative Director of the Awele Creative Trust. In addition to that, she is judge for the Man Booker International Prize of 2016. In 2016/2017 she is Bonderman Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Brown in Rhode Island, USA. In addition to her many awarded fictional writings, Chika Unigwe publishes many essays in anthologies, journals, and magazines in many universities in Nigeria, England, and USA. The major themes Unigwe tackles in her writings are immigration, exploitation, and sexism. Many of her works are inspired by the works of Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, and others.

## **2. A Synopsis of *On Black Sisters' Street* and its Reception**

*On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) revolves around four different, yet much related stories of three Nigerian young women, Efe, Ama, and Sisi, and Joyce, who is Sudanese. Unigwe draws the psychological portraits of immigrants forced into prostitution and breaks the myth of the oldest profession in the world by demonstrating societal corruption, disillusionment, and exploitation both in Nigeria and Belgium. Even if the main plot of the novel is Sisi's

murder, there are three other stories that are as touching and worth telling. The four girls work as prostitutes in the Red-Light District of the city of Antwerp in Belgium and live together in Zwartesusterstraat house their Madam has rented them. They are sent there by a Nigerian business man and pimp called Senghor Dele with the promise of paying back their 30.000 euros fee monthly for years.

The novel starts with the sudden murder of Sisi that opens up the girls to each other. As we turn the pages, we know more about their stories after being anonymous to each other. They realize that they have but each other. The narrator tells the story of Sisi/Chisom and her first encounter with Dele who offers her a job abroad for a fee of 30.000 euros that she is to pay back slowly. She accepts only to find herself working as a forced prostitute in Belgium.

The nameless narrator unfolds the story of Efe, an adolescent who becomes a 'sugar baby' of a fifty years old fat hair-weave merchant who showers her with money and expensive gifts when she is sixteen and leaves her pregnant. This is the main reason that pushes her to accept to go abroad. From one hand she wants to ensure a good life for her son, from another hand, she wants to save her father and her siblings from the poverty they suffer from in Nigeria. Ama's troubling story of rape and abuse by her stepfather, an assistant bishop in a church, is revealed in separate episodes. When she decides to uncover the truth, Brother Cyril kicks her out. Her going to Belgium is as much to revolt against humans' hypocrisy as material need. Concerning Joyce, born as Alek, she is the most miserable of all. She is a Sudanese that witnesses the murder of her family and is a victim of gang-rape during the Sudanese Civil War. She meets a defending soldier, Polycarp, in a refugee camp and falls in love with him. Believing he is her soul-mate, she moves with him to live together in Lagos for two years until the day he leaves her because of his Igbo background. Polycarp introduces Joyce to Dele and, for compensating his harm, pays her fees.

As the story goes on, we learn, through the chapters entitled “Sisi”, the events that lead to her death. As the rebel among the girls, she decides to run away with her Belgian boyfriend Luc, but Dele orders to kill her. She might not have suffered from genocide, rape, or pregnancy but her story is as much important as others.

*On Black Sisters’ Street* has been received positively by African and Western readers and critics. Fernanda Eberstradt, in her review entitled “Tales from the Global Sex Trade”, stated that people who oppose immigration tend to ignore the arguments that push the immigrants to leave everything behind them and quit their home town. They also ignore the hardships the immigrants face abroad as well as the abuse they undergo if they are victims of an Underground Railroad trade. For Eberstradt, this kind of unholy traffic in impoverished strivers is a topic that many Europeans and international writers remain silent about, but not Chika Unigwe in her novel *On Black Sisters’ Street* because she understands well hunger and its poverty (*The New York Times*). For the author, *On Black Sisters’ Street* is written in a way that makes the reader feel empathy towards the protagonists because Unigwe mingles her experience as a Nigerian to the experiences of the four girls. The reviewer says: “*On Black Sisters’ Street* marks the arrival of a latter-day Thackeray, an Afro-Belgian writer who probes with passion, grace, and comic verve the underbelly of our globalized new world economy” (*The New York Times*).

Bernadine Evaristo in *The Independent* considered Unigwe as a strong, courageous, and daring woman who tackles a non-conventional topic which is a life of Nigerian girls working in the Red-Light District of Antwerp in Belgium. Unigwe, according to Evaristo, unveils the sordid nature of the job, how it is exerted, and its illegal foundations (*The Independent* 3 July 2009). She also displays many reasons that lead Nigerian women into prostitution in Europe. Evaristo says that *On Black Sisters’ Street* is a novel that touches its readers either way

because Unigwe gives voice to the unvoiced and buries the stories of the consensual prostitutes to bestow the dignity of those who are stripped off it.

Nicola Barr, in a book review, claimed in *The Guardian* (11 Sept. 2010) that the efforts Unigwe puts in making her research have paid off in her writing. She shows the small pleasures the girls indulge themselves in when they go out to escape the indignity of their life. She puts those counterparts in a way that is “observed and heartbreaking”. This piece of prose, according to Barr, with the childhood tragedies the girls lived, and the passive ruthless men who abuse them portray explicitly prostitutes battling against the world.

### **3. Human and Sex Trafficking in Non-Fiction and Fiction: A Brief Overview**

Slavery is abolished in 1865 in The United States thanks to the Emancipation Proclamation signed by President Abraham Lincoln. Many writers, fugitive slaves or their children, write about the themes of slavery and human trafficking in what are commonly known as slave narratives. Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northup, and many others who are descendants from African origins, document their personal experiences as victims and survivors of slave trade.

*The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself* is one of the slave narratives that expose the conditions of African-Americans in the southern plantations of the United States. Harriet Jacobs, for example, writes about sexual abuse by slave traders and slaveholders as a way to dominate slaves. In Africa, and more specifically Northern Nigeria, under the Caliphate and later the British rule, men control women through the institution of concubinage.<sup>1</sup> Clandestine trade supply female slaves, and

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<sup>1</sup>For more details see Paul E. Lovejoy, “Concubinage and the Status of Women Slaves in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria”, *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1988), pp. 245-266.

colonial officials are not against these practices; in fact, they send patrols to persuade female refugees or concubines to return to their masters.

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 live. Apart from Chika Unigwe, There are many writers who write about this new form of slavery like Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyoin* (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.

Indeed, slavery specific to African Americans is abolished only to give birth to a modern-day slavery, a "white slavery" as described by Ethan B. Kapstein in his article "The New Global Slave Trade" (108). 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.

According to the United Nations protocol *To Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children*,

Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation,

forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (Article 3 a)

*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-identify for many reasons (9). This means that it is hard to identify the victims because of different reasons that we are discussing in the coming paragraphs. Kapstein claims that “it seems almost certain that the modern global slave is larger in absolute terms than the Atlantic slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was” (105). In fact, Alison Siskin and Liana Sun Wyler in their booklet *Trafficking in Persons: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress* write that the US government estimates approximately 600.000 to 800.000 persons are trafficked across global borders each year, if we include those trafficked within their country borders, they estimate approximately 2 to 4 million people trafficked annually (7). However, the *Trafficking in Persons Report* of 2013 estimates that more than 20 million people are enslaved nowadays and forced to do different labors (6). These numbers that are not reached in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The 2018 *UN Trafficking in Persons Report* exposes the forms of Human Trafficking as persons who can be trafficked for sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, forced labor, bonded labor, debt bondage, domestic servitude, forced child labor, unlawful recruitment, or use of child soldiers (32-3). Siskin and Wyler affirm that, “trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has historically been the most commonly reported –and prosecuted– form of human trafficking globally” (8). It is important to include these information about human trafficking in order to understand its global seriousness as it is also the main theme of our studied novel.

Human Trafficking is a business that fosters globalization and is initiated through globalization from the first place. Devin Brewer writes in “Globalization and Sex trafficking”

that globalization is “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets that transcend nation-state boundaries” (46). He explains that according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2008, 2.4 billion people are at risk of Human Trafficking because of their socio-economic conditions. He says that globalization is pronounced mainly in economy, and human trafficking is a very lucrative business that takes part in this economy; he adds “globalization fosters interdependence between the states for commerce and facilitates the transfer of commodities” (47).

Omolala A. Ladele and Adesunmido E. Omotayo write in their essay “Migration and Identities in Chika Unigwe’s Novels” that migration increase due to globalization (52), especially after the dependence of African countries on the Western world that coincide with the heydays of globalization, and this is well illustrated by Chika Unigwe in her novels mainly *On Black Sisters’ Street*. Traffickers build their fortune over exploitation of vulnerable groups of people. Gayatri Spivak in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” says that in contemporary international division of labor, in territorial imperialism, the countries of the first world are investing capital while Third World countries provide field for investment. According to her, with globalization, the comprador countries of Third World assure a cheap labor (83). A point that Unigwe does showcase in her novel through her protagonists who are exploited for cheap wages but gain fortunes for their trafficker both in Nigeria and Belgium.

In order to understand more human trafficking and its relevance and representation in literature, we make reference to an article written by David Okech, Y. Joon Choi, Jennifer Elkins, and Abigail C. Burns titled “Seventeen Years of Human Trafficking Research in Social Work: A Review of the Literature.” It deals with the theme of Human Trafficking in literature going from 2000 when the Trafficked Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in the United Nations (UN) protocol is signed, to 2017. They find that 80 journals have published a total of

94 articles, most of them discuss sex trafficking of women and children and labor trafficking ignoring other forms of this crime (1-7). In addition to that, they explain that most of them are from USA and most of victims targeted are minor girls (8). The reviewers pay attention to the recommendations and policies developed in these articles to fight this crime. Some of them suggest “[the] need for collaboration and coordination among various stockholders and policy makers in the local and international arenas” (8). This may be to reinforce the fight against the trafficking syndicates. Others suggest more empirical research that the statistical one to spread awareness among people (10), and another measure is to include the theme of Human Trafficking in educational curriculums transnationally (13). This might be to introduce different generations to this global crime in order to help identify it and take the right measure to avoid falling in the trap of traffickers.

Suzette R. Grillot, in her article “What to Read Now: Human Trafficking” (2013), explains that although slavery is abolished a century ago, it is repeated but in another form known as human trafficking. Grillot gives the example of *A Walk across the Sun*, a novel written by Corban Addison in 2011.

Other books reviewed by Grillot that can be used by researchers include David Batstone’s *Not for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade - and how We Can Fight it Back* (2007), Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s *Half of the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for the Women Worldwide* (2009), and Somaly Mam’s *The Road of Lost Innocence: The True Story of Cambodian Heroin* (2005).

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 Ojdiran’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. This study is not a comparative one, but 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*).

It must be reminded that Nigerian literature sees light in the 18<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 socio-economic 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.

Many organizations are created to protect women and the victims of exploitation; however, different forms of oppression still exist. Nder O. Matthias, for example, studies Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* in "The Expression of Nigerian Ladies in the International Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: A Reading of Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*." he focuses on the Nigerian organizations that work for the same reason and fight the oppression and

exploitation of women like *Women in Nigeria* (20). However, the author argues that women still suffer from rape, abuse and sexual exploitation; this is why many Nigerian writers raise their voices against this injustice (21).

#### **4. Marxist Feminism and the Issues of Gender Oppression and Capitalism**

After giving biographical and literary backgrounds, it is time to sketch out the theories and methodologies that will guide this project. To understand the principles of Marxist-feminism and be able to deduce its relevance to the present research, it is preferable to make a quick recapitulation of the principles of Marxism and Feminism as two independent movements.

Marxism is a theoretical movement that appears with the writings of Karl Marx like *Das Kapital* published in 1867 and *The German Ideology* co-written with Friedrich Engels and published in 1932. The main issue that Marxists deal with is labor-division as well as class-division creating the bourgeois people who own property and exploit the proletariat for profits. Feminism, in contrast, is a revolutionary movement which appears first in the eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, first published in 1792, is the first philosophical work which serves later as a blueprint by modern feminists and activists. Feminism has known different waves through history, going from 1920s to the second wave in 1970s, and the third wave in the 1990s on until 2008 when the fourth wave starts.

Feminists see patriarchy as a power relationship by which men dominate. According to Martha E. Gimenez, even though Marx does not make reference to the exploitation of women specifically, his methodological and theoretical insights are necessary to understand the limitation that capitalism imposes on women. This is, for her, the most important potential contribution of Marx to feminism (14).

We may agree with this statement in the sense that Marx's theory and methodology of "Dialectic Materialism"<sup>2</sup> helps understand and make the relation between capitalist exploitation of workers economically and women's social oppression through patriarchy. Unlike radical feminists, according to Veronica Beechey, Marxist-feminists "have attempted to analyze the relationship between the subordination of women and the organization of various modes of production" (66). In other words, Marxist-feminism is a double use of the concept of subordination to meet more adequately the oppression of women socially and their exploitation through class-system (67). Zillah R. Eisenstein in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1979) distinguishes between exploitation and oppression. The former stands for economic capitalist class relations for men and women in production whereas the latter refers to minorities like woman both in her exploitation force and her relations that define her existence in patriarchal sexual hierarchy as mother, domestic laborer, and consumer (22). She puts this issue in a clearer way saying that "male supremacy and capitalism are defined as the core relations determining the oppression of women today" (1). She says that there is a mutually reinforced dialectical relationship between capitalist class-struggle and hierarchical sexual structure (5).

Michèll Barrett, on the other hand, talks about two concepts that are fundamental in Marxist-feminist theory which are production and reproduction. Juliet Mitchel adds on these two; women's sexuality and socialization of children in her essay "Women: The Longest Revolution." This means that women are oppressed in their production, reproduction, sexuality, and their role in socializing children. According to Barrett, the concept of women's reproduction is not only concerned with reproduction of materials, but also reproduction of children who are the future labor force for the capitalist society (22). Barrett writes, "The concept of 'reproduction' has in recent years been used as a crucial mechanism for relating

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<sup>2</sup>It is an idea about which Marx speaks in *The German Ideology*. The word "dialect" he has taken from Hegel to mean the process of thought involving different opinions and views that involve discussion that lead to conclusions.

women's oppression to the organization of production in different societies" (19). Thus, women are reduced to functional items assuring the extension of labor force. In other words, being mothers annuls any chance for women to claim a full wage work outside the house.

It should be noted, however, that Engels in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* has made a quick reference to the oppression of women. In her introduction, Pat Brewer assumes that Marxism rejects any claim that women's oppression is eternal, thinking that capitalism is to eradicate patriarchy since for them, women's oppression is not biological but social (9). Nowadays, according to Engels, Hetaerism<sup>3</sup> has taken a more extreme form which is prostitution (74). For Engels, the oppression of women starts with the institution of marriage that alters the freedom of women leading to their inequality with men (79). However, he does not make a reference to the exploitation of women economically.

In a passage taken from *The German Ideology*, Marx argues that the division of labor comes from the natural division of labor in family first, i.e. patriarchy (184). He states that the institution of patriarchy where wife and children are the slaves of the husband is an earlier form of what comes later known as division of labor in modern economy (185). If a woman decides to work, he writes, capitalism imposes on her underpaid jobs, and even if she wants to, her husband prohibits her because she has domestic work to do (Ibid). So, Marx and Engels do approve patriarchy as an oppressive system on women, but we understand that they believe that it is the only oppression women suffer from. Christine Delphy also, in her essay "The Main Enemy", tackles this issue saying that even if women have gained more access to power after 1960s and are legally free to work outside, their husbands do not approve that because they are always expected to fulfill their domestic chores, mainly mothering (32). This is what Betty Friedan calls "Schizophrenic Split" in the preface of *The Feminine Mystique*.

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<sup>3</sup> Hetaerism is a word Engels takes from Johann Jakob Bachofen's book *Mother Right* (1992). It means having a continued or temporary relationship between a man and woman and having children out of wedlock. In this case, the two writers make reference to the matriarchal societies that prevailed before modern civilization.

Marxist-feminists, according to Barrett, argue that Marxism must take into account women's domestic labor and their insecure positions as wage laborers in addition to a familiar ideology that oppresses them (30). Marx, as we can see, makes reference to division of labor within the family, but he does not go beyond that. He makes reference to slavery of a wife and her children to her husband but does not explain how. So, this lack of information about the social relations as a whole, according to Barrett is what pushes feminists' activity in Women's Liberation Movement to make a link with Marxism (38).

According to Beechey, women have no more difference than class-style compared to their difference to men. They are "conceptualized as being the minority group within the dominant society" (68). By the dominant society, we think she means men, since women are silenced objects. Beechey states that revolutionary feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys formulate the "women question" as "sex-class system" that consists in men's ownership and control of women's reproductive powers (69). Thus, the author affirms that the revolutionary feminists come to develop women's class consciousness making them aware that it is not woman's biology that puts her in a class; but the value men put on it, and the power they derive from their control over it (Ibid). So far, however, feminists ignore the analysis of production upon which economic classes are based. Beechey supports her analysis with Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* saying that Mitchell argues that the universality of patriarchy is rooted in the exchange of women by men in the institution of marriage of prostitution. According to Beechey, Mitchell views capitalism as a system that makes the patriarchal law redundant (73), in the sense that men as producers enter the class-dominated structures of history while women as reproducers remain defined by kinship relations. For her, the concept of "reproduction" is used ambiguously because none of the scholars has made a definite conclusion about it (78). For this reason, she concludes that the process of production and

reproduction are the same, in the sense that as in their production of materials or their reproduction of humans, women are the inferior gender.

Consequently, patriarchy should be studied within the specific modes of production in capitalist time and pre-capitalist time because the form of domination has changed from the latter period to the former (80). Beechey explains this saying: “Women having previously been subject to the control of their husbands within the household, become subjects to capitalist control if they are wage laborers” being thus, subjects to both social dominance and capitalist one (80).

Christine Delphy in “The Main Enemy” views the Marxist point of view centered not on the oppression of women, but on the consequence of this oppression for the proletariat” (23). As a result, Delphy is constructing here a simple, yet definite relationship between Marxism and feminism confirming Beechey’s statement about the origins of Marxist-feminism. She argues that all contemporary societies are based on the unpaid, unrecognized labor of woman for domestic services and childbearing that are controlled by her relationship to her husband. These services, thus, “are excluded from the realm of exchange and consequently have no *value*” (25), since in capitalism, labor has an exchange value. She counters those who believe that women are excluded from production saying, “it is women as economic agents who are excluded from the (exchange) market, not their production” (26). Delphy believes that patriarchy is the main source of oppression of women, and to liberate them, the patriarchal system of production and reproduction should be completely destroyed (37-9). For her, “the control or reproduction . . . constitutes the second facet of the oppression of women” (38). Again, she discards or underestimates the economic exploitation women suffer from. She neglects that this oppression in production is engendered by capitalism.

Nancy Chodorow, in her essay “Motherhood, Male Dominance and Capitalism”, asserts that the capitalist system maintains the growing labor force which leaves the poor,

poor and renders the rich richer. Every legitimate ideology sustains this system, so “women’s role and work activities in the contemporary family contribute to the social reproduction specific to capitalism” (95). Hence, we may say that the domestic role of women is a continuum inherited role from the pre-capitalist era because industrialization draws men to the public sphere leaving women in the domestic one.

Gimenez says that it is important to examine the ways capitalism combined to patriarchy contribute to women’s oppression (13). In her study of Marx’s reference to production and reproduction, she explains how capitalism could lead to the separation of social relations (19-20). In other words, a separation between members of the same family by characterizing men as the only producers and women as consumers. This means that if someone does not earn the means of production, it becomes difficult to reproduce in households. Ultimately, according to the researcher, this condition leads men and women to compete for jobs, but because of sex-segregation, the property-less women are denied access to well-paid jobs resulting, thus in “feminization of poverty” (22) because women are the property-less and the poor both as wage laborers and households.

For Juliet Mitchell, women have three roles within the family; reproduction, sexuality, and socialization of children (20). Production and reproduction, for her, are the same process because women are the only gender that can bear children, so they are naturally and biologically doomed to social exploitation making them unable to control child birth. To fight this, women evoke contraception, nevertheless, she argues that it is illegal in some countries and unaffordable in others. Thus, women remain socio-economically powerless (21). As for sexuality, it is a principle through which women are oppressed in their marriages (23), they are used procure pleasure for their husbands. Then she moves to the principle of socialization. She says that many anthropologists believe that a child has two parents, the father playing the instrumental role, and the mother playing the expressive one since she is the one taking care

of her children (26). For Mitchell, the mother is the one helping her children build their future personality and identity, since psychology proves it. Consequently, this is “widely used as an argument to reassert women’s quintessential natural function, at a time when the traditional family has seemed increasingly eroded” (27).

Last, the aspect of sexuality, according to her, it is the one that changes the most and is the weakest in the chain because it is liberated and altering the classical form of marriage (32). If sex is liberated, there will be less work and more leisure in the capitalist society. Sexual liberation, therefore, has negative effects such as divorce and the spread of prostitution. For this, she says that sexuality can never work alone in liberating women (33). This is also why all four structures should be interrelated to balance the condition of women who are confined to a monolithic functions limited in marriage as “natural beings” (34). The solution for her is the right for equal work and also for education because the educational system, for her, is a solid extra-economic foundation on which the pyramid of discrimination rests (35). However, as we will see in *On Black Sisters’ Street*, even if there is education, there is corruption.

Asoka Bandarage, studies the condition of women in the Third World. She says that as in the West modernization, the East also believes that “all women can be liberated within the capitalist world” (496). This is mainly believed, like she says, by the Women in Development school (WID), which is a new field of academic enquiry pertaining to poor women in the Third World (Ibid).

The WID, according to Bandarage, has the same objective as the Western Women Liberation Movement which is encouraging women to exercise in formal sectors of the Third World economies using legislative reforms and intervention projects (498). In addition to that, she claims that the mystification and extension of housewife ideology from the West to the Third World has caused the undervaluation of domestic production of women (500). This is

because before capitalism, the domestic production of women is essential and important for the economy of the society. However, with capitalism, production has moved outside the house making men more eligible for it than women neglecting thus, the domestic production. The author makes a good remark about the demands of the WID saying that they focus on the inclusion of women in production forgetting about the exploitation they can undergo making it, hence, more exploitative than beneficial (502-3). Consequently, she concludes that women cannot find their liberation within capitalism (Ibid). Radical feminists, according to her, dive into fighting universal patriarchy practiced in many ways such as rape, prostitution, and wife battery that are neglected issues (505). She concludes saying that “patriarchy and capitalism are dialectical relations, and their dissolution requires a dialectical analysis” (506) as we may see in our analysis of Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*.

According to Zillah Eisenstein, oppression is a result of capitalist organization and is based on lack of power and control of the proletariat worker who creates surplus value for the bourgeoisie (8-9), specifically women. The roots of women’s exploitation are not in her reproductive nature because woman’s body and sexuality cannot connect women to the structure of power, for it does not explain power relations in our society (Eisenstein 19). In order to understand the ideology that prevails women’s subordination in capitalist-patriarchy, Eisenstein recommends the understanding of liberalism, male supremacy, and racism (47-8). When talking about family, she makes reference only to women because for her, class hierarchy maintains male’s supremacy (49). She concludes that male’s patriarchy is sustained in the division of labor as a vessel of social, cultural, and economic reproduction and “women are exchanged as gifts for what they could bear” (Ibid).

Ellen Du Bois confirms this view saying: “we study the past to learn how to think about the present” (137). This means that we should see how women are treated in the past to see how they are treated now and understand the difference in their situation. Du Bois says

that first feminists see capitalism as the source of the oppression of women, then they started identifying marriage and family as basic sources of this oppression (138).

Marxism and Feminism are disparate, but both call for emancipation. Shahrzad Mojab in *Marxism and Feminism* explains that the Marxism and Feminism have never been so far apart as at present theoretically (3). For her, patriarchy survives through restoration of capitalism in the 1990s. Mojab declares that “[m]ale power, much like class rule is exercised through both coercion and consent” (4) Consent is perpetuated in social institutions, while violence is through the law forces. According to her, Marxism reduces gender relations to class relations failing to appreciate that patriarchy is a political struggle among, and within class. As a consequence, feminists nowadays do not reject capitalism, but take the issue of women to political level detaching itself from Marxism (6). It is therefore necessary to combine Marxism and feminism to generate an effective challenge to all these forms of oppression (24). The Marxists do not deal with gender oppression which is, for them, a social problem; they rather focus on the class struggle created by capitalism as an economic system. This is in fact the clash between Marxists and feminists that leads to the birth of Marxist-feminism.

Heidi Hartmann, in her essay “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”, joins Mojab’s view about the separation of Marxism and Feminism as well as Marxist-feminists. She says that Marxism takes the lead over feminism when it comes to “the women question,” in the sense that research about the oppression of women is dominated by studies about the relations of production and reproduction, rather than the question of women’s relation to men (2), or their patriarchal oppression. In other words, Marxists, according to Hartmann, ignore the oppression of women domestically and focus more on capitalist progression eroding patriarchal relations. Hence, she claims that the end of capitalism does not mean the end of patriarchy because men benefit from women’s impunity from housework

(3). Firestone, according to Hartmann, esteems that the technological mode is for males and aesthetics for women, this is why men get more jobs (10).

Marxist feminism is the theory that deals with women oppression in the domestic sphere as well as the public one through production, reproduction, sexuality, and childbearing. 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. Women are oppressed because of their work inside and outside the house, and the consequence it may have, is some of the main themes Chika Unigwe discusses in *On Black Sisters' Street*. This is why we believe that Marxist-feminism is suitable to study women in *On Black Sisters' Street*.

## Chapter Two:

### Women's Socio-Economic Conditions in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

#### Introduction

The present chapter attempts to study the social and economic conditions of the four protagonists in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. By conditions I mean patriarchy at all levels (sexism, marriage, dominance, and lack of sisterhood) as well as poverty, shattered dreams, and the desire for a better life that is expressed through globalization of economy or what is mostly known as the Capitalist system. My premise is that sex work is a consequence of capitalist patriarchy.

#### 1. Patriarchy

Patriarchy can be defined as a social ideology that exists in many societies. Broadly speaking, it consists in locking women at home and keeping them for house chores as Betty Friedan reminds us: "Locked as we all were in that mystique" (1). Asoka Bondarage, a scholar and researcher in The Women in Development School (WID) which includes writers like Ester Boserup, argues that women are confined and oppressed mainly because of patriarchy in the capitalist system. The writer explains that patriarchy is at the core of women's oppression because men, since the European capitalism, are always more privileged and have education, property rights, and better jobs, thus women are "forced to accept whatever jobs they can find as field-hands, street vendors, maids or prostitutes" (498). L.L. Kwatsha writes about African women in her article "Some Aspects of Gender Inequality in Selected African Literary Texts" that in Africa, males treat women as honorary children and not as whole beings, a women "is viewed as unfinished, physically mutilated and emotionally dependent. On the other hand, men are designed to be dominant" (130). Other feminists also

support this idea, such as Betty Friedan<sup>4</sup> and Juliet Mitchell. Unigwe demonstrates it well in her novel as it will be shown in the following pages.

Josephine Donovan in “Women and the Rise of the Novel: A Feminist-Marxist Theory” makes reference to two books written by Margaret Cavendish.<sup>5</sup> In the first one, according to Donovan, Cavendish rejects the commodification of women; the writer points out to the absence of female property in the household, for children always take after the name of their fathers. Only men can keep the lineage of the family while girls are like branches of trees “movable goods” (457-58). In the second book of Cavendish that Donovan refers to, the former describes women as worms “ ‘that live in the dull earth of ignorance . . . - [and] kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses. . . we are shut out of all power and authority’ ” (458).

Another writer who makes reference to patriarchy as a reason for women’s confinement is Juliet Mitchell in her long essay entitled “Women: The Longest Revolution”. She talks about the marginalization of women, she says: “within the world of men their position is comparable to that of an oppressed minority” (11).

Sisi’s story is the central focus and plot of Unigwe’s novel. From the opening chapter we learn that Sisi is murdered. This event is the button that triggered the following chapters thanks to the techniques of Unigwe. The three other girls with whom Sisi works realize that they have no one but each other in a foreign country. This is why they decide to open up about their stories, and the main reasons that push them to come to Antwerp to become forced

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<sup>4</sup>Betty Friedan in her famous work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) speaks about the conditions of women how they felt in the realm of patriarchy and how women had no identity because they are always at home and have no voice.

<sup>5</sup>The first one is *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1964) where she spoke about the relation of women to marriage. The second one is *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1955) where she points out at the confinement of women at home like birds in cages.

prostitutes under the dominance of a single men, Senghor Dele. Sisi shares the same motives with her roommates notably patriarchy and corruption of the Nigerian government.

### **1.1. Male Dominance (Sexism)**

What characterizes a patriarchal society is the dominance of its men over its women. It is not surprising to find abundant examples in *On Black Sisters' Streets* of subjugation and even suppression of women in the male dominated Nigerian society. Sisi, a central character, finds herself unemployed after studying four years of Finance and Business Administration in the University of Lagos. In a country like Nigeria where nepotism and favoritism are widespread observable facts, having zero connections and being female mean that a freshly graduated young woman has zero chance to get a decent job. Sisi herself admits that getting a job in a bank does not demand intelligence but *connections* (22).

Spivak says that the elitists in India (as in other Third World countries) are the high class and are chosen by the colonizers. The elite, as she explains, are either dominant foreign groups or dominant indigenous groups (74). In the case of Sisi, the colonizer is corruption, and the elite are the dominant groups. Patriarchy starts to manifest itself in the kind of jobs women have and are more fit for not only in Africa, but also in Western world. Spivak adds on that saying that when it comes to the subaltern of women, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. In the sense that they are considered as objects of pleasure and subjects of insurgency (82). Ghazali Bello Abubakar in his article “Condition of Women in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges” argues that even if there are some Nigerian regions that allow women to study, the society in general remains patriarchal and women, educated or not, are always seen inferior to men (2).

Unigwe in her novel also explains how women have very limited job opportunities. Indeed, the labor market is patriarchal; job segregation really exists in Nigeria and all over the

world. Both patriarchy and capitalism intensify women's oppression and lead women to choose only exploitative and underpaid jobs.

Sisi realizes the patriarchy of her society in a taxi when she is going to the airport to Antwerp. Elina Penttinen writes: "women are considered not to need the same level of income as men since they are assumed to bring only secondary income to the family or else to be so young that they will soon marry, start a family and leave the workplace" (4). Unigwe shows this conviction through the taxi driver that brings Sisi to the airport. According to him, boys merit a good education more than girls " 'because a son deserves the best' " (47). It is as if women have no right for a good education, for him, and the same for the majority of men, " 'you girls are lucky. All you need is a rich man to snap you up and you're made' " (Ibid). This means that girls have to be dependent on their husbands. They are objects and not human beings with rights to decide for their own lives. According to Kwatsha, this topic is expressed by Mothlaban's drama *Linkunzi Ezimbini* where he talks about traditional patriarchy (133). Mitchell also tackles this issue in her essay "Reflection on Twenty Years of Feminism". According to her, sexual distinction starts from childhood. Boys receive training that is immediately geared to future employment while girls get education only to serve others. Hence, this is how women's education is, according to her, downgraded (39).

The importance of being a man and having male children is very important as Friedan and Cavendish, for example, assume. When Efe becomes pregnant from Titus, she wishes her baby to be a boy: " 'I hope it's a boy. If it's a boy his father would definitely want him' " (65). Yes boys are very important, and Unigwe shows this with Sisi's father who blames his wife, sometimes, for not giving him a boy: "He misses not having a son and would say whenever they had a quarrel that every man had a right to a son" (92). He even tells her that if he were a little more fortunate, he would marry another woman who could give him a son. In

other words, Sisi's father blames his wife for not having a son and he links this fact to his poverty so he is being a patriarch to his wife.

Ugoshi Happiness Ikone writes in her article "Sexism in Igbo Traditional and contemporary Society: A Challenge to Igbo Women" that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the roles of men and women are reversed, in the sense, that parents rely on their daughters to support the economic status of the family (11). Indeed, sexism and poverty push Sisi to go abroad and become a forced prostitute to save not only herself, but most importantly, her parents. There is also the example of the woman who sits next to Ama in the bus on her way to Lagos who thinks that her son should have a boy because "it was his duty to perpetuate the family line, to live up to his name" (142). The importance of boys in the family is crucial because women have no voice, no identity, and no existence in the eyes of their parents and men in general. In fact, they are not praised for their personalities even. Being a good domestic housewife is what imports more than having a personality as Mama Eko tells Ama about her maid: " 'any girl who cooked the way she did was sure to end up with a good man. That was how the world worked' " (159). Women are praised for their domestic chores and skills or in bed for giving boys to their husbands; they are not liked because of their qualities as human beings. They are considered as tools to reach a certain aim for the well-being of men.

Another example that Kwatsha provides us with, concerning this issue is Bushi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. Kwatsha studies the protagonist Nnu Ego and her attitude as a childless women in a Nigerian society. She says that Nnu Ego almost killed herself when she lost her child because "she knew that, according to her culture she had wronged her husband" (151).

Another consequence of patriarchy that we can understand in Unigwe's novel is that women are aware of their husbands' dominance but do nothing to change or claim their

freedom and identity. An instance that we can extract from the novel is Ama's mother who is oppressed by her husband for so long and is silent about it. The fact that she even begs her husband to say nothing about her past when he is about to reveal his real identity to Ama shows how much she knows and how much she hides. She does not allow herself to hear the reality about her miserable life in a male-dominated society. She exclaims helplessly: “ ‘not now Brother Cyril. Please?’ . . . The same position she assumed when she prayed and called on her God to forgive her” (148). She begs her husband as if he were her God because she knows that in a patriarchal society only pure women are accepted as wives, and she is not pure (a virgin) when Brother Cyril decides to help her. “ ‘How many men would marry a woman who was carrying a child for another man? . . . He could have us out tonight. Many men would’ ” (150). She tells Ama as if she is lucky to be saved.

Kwatsha writes that “[in] traditional male role identities (in Africa) women are often seen as inferior to men” (133). Women, therefore, become submissive by nature. In other words, the women believe by themselves that they are men's subordinates and inferior to women from higher classes too. This is shown in the way they accept to live with their husbands, as Ama's mother here. Kwatsha states that “it reaffirms the demands and expectations of traditional culture and patriarchy” (141).

Unigwe accentuates the degree of Brother Cyril's patriarchy when he throws out his step-daughter when she confesses that he raped her when she was only eight. He does not want his reputation to be affected. Unigwe, in fact, portrays also the corruption of religious men and their hypocrisy since he is an assistant pastor. She exclaims this hypocrisy through Dele's voice too when Joyce is about to be sent to Belgium when he says to Polycarp: “ ‘if you wan' make big money go become pastor, I swear. You don' see the big big cars wey dey follow these pastors when dem dey comot?’ ”(229). Indeed, Brother Cyril uses religion as a pretext to execute his domination on both Ama and her mother. He uses religion to stop Ama

from going out to play with her friends because “he said sometimes friends led one astray” (123). When she wants to have musicians at her birthday, he prohibits it saying: “ ‘it’s the devil’s music’ ” (128). He also recites verses from the Bible to prevent her from reading magazines, drinking alcohol, or curse. This is maybe why in Antwerp Ama drinks permanently, smokes a lot, and curses. It is a kind of revenge from her patriarchal hypocrite stepfather.

When he rapes her at the age of eight, he silences her with religion. She pushes him back when she is hurt, but “when she did this her father would demand, ‘what is the fifth commandment?’ ‘Honor thy father and thy mother’, she would reply” (132). He steps into her life to shatter her dreams of going to boarding school in Onishta saying: “ ‘how can we keep an eye on you if you go so far? The good Lord will not want us failing in our duty as your parents’ ” (145). He knows how to impose himself, either by using religion as a pretext or by using violence. Whenever he does not receive what he wants, he hits. This is why neither Ama, when she was young, nor her mother can resist him. Ama’s mother allows herself to be exploited and oppressed because she is ashamed of what she did. She feels guilty because she has been pregnant with someone else’s baby, for this she feels that she owes her husband her dignity in the society, for such reason she is passive and does not contradict him.

Unigwe shows many instances when Ama’s mother is being an unconscious passive victim. For example, when he Brother Cyril uses her as his servant to boil his clothes and wash them (144) or when he calls her “ ‘a woman fit for Christian eyes’ to sooth him and get him a glass of water” (130). When he describes her as a virgin, I think that he uses it purposefully to humiliate her and remind her implicitly that she was not virgin when he married her. When Ama confesses about her awful past, Ama’s mother directly slaps her and stands by her husband defending him and rejecting her daughter’s truth (148). This form of submission causes the loss of compassion and affection between the two women.

## 1.2. Polygamy

The first example of how patriarchy is related to polygamy and how both endorse and perpetuate male domination is found in the second chapter when Unigwe tells about the party Efe organizes for her deceased grandmother. The husband of Efe's auntie has four wives. When he is about to go to England, the auntie wants to go with him, but he refuses giving her silly excuses. Efe says: "Dat na de only way he could tink of to stop her *wahalaing* him about travelling with him. Four wives and she wanted him to pick her above the rest? And she no be even the chief wife" (5). In this passage, patriarchy obviously manifests itself just as Mitchell says: "it is clearly a total degradation of women's autonomy, and constitutes an extreme form of oppression" (23). First of all, the man is married four times, and one of the wives is the chief so he prefers her over the others. Second, he does not allow his woman to travel with him and he takes her for a fool trying to convince her that the Embassy of England requires GCSE results for a visa. A male dominated society makes women passive citizens and creates rivalry between them to avoid sisterhood and potential revolt. This separation between wives helps them because marriage is very important in patriarchal societies as a whole especially in Africa.

The patriarchal system does not only push women to endure polygamy, but also infidelity. For example, Titus' wife endures meetings with her husband's many mistresses and their babies. When Efe goes to inform Titus about his baby, his wife takes his defense replying: " 'you'. She pointed a finger. 'You have come into my house and accuse my husband of fathering your baby. How dare you?' " (70). Titus's wife brutally humiliates Efe instead of blaming her husband of cheating on her because she is defenseless and financially dependent. The reader learns later that Efe is not the only mistress who goes to Titus's to claim his fatherhood, but his wife dismisses them all the same way. She defends her spouse against cheating allegations to survive, just like Ama's mother who stands by her rapist

husband out of fear to lose the image of the virtuous woman. Both women abide some practices to survive in patriarchal societies where women become insignificant after losing their male breadwinners! In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, there are no real legal guarantees for the welfare of divorced women and their children.

### **1.3. Absence of Sisterhood**

Another aspect of patriarchy that is illustrated in Unigwe's novel is the lack of sisterhood. Women are enemies to each other in a society, where pleasing a man is an obligation to survive peacefully. It is one common reason that we find among the four protagonists of the novel that push them to flee their home country.

The first story to which readers are exposed is Efe's. She is a girl who loves fancy things, however she is poor and needs money, so she become a 'sugar baby'. Titus is old enough to be her father, but most importantly, he is rich (49). However, after the man puts his offspring in her, he leaves her; " 'I'm pregnant Titus' was all it took to get him out of the bed" (59). He is a man with a big reputation. Afraid to be humiliated and misperceived, he chooses to flee the responsibility in a society where men are the leaders leaving Efe feeling like damaged goods (75). So, when she appears to be pregnant, Efe's neighbors (women especially) despise her, "the women especially who pointed at Efe and laughed out loud whenever they passed her" (64). They even forbid their daughters to talk to her. Instead of being there for her and support her since she has no mother and is young, they marginalize her and ignore her. In addition to the neighbors, Titus's wife participates in the loss of sisterhood. The way she chases Efe out of her home instead of yelling at her husband shows it all. She treats Efe of a " 'useless girl. *Ashawo* ' " (70). Eisenstein says that in a bourgeois class position, family relations are reduced to a mere money relation (10). This is the case for Titus and his wife. She accepts her husband's infidelity as long as he has enough money to provide

her with what she needs. This is according to Eisenstein a form of oppression, she says: “women’s oppression is her exploitation in a class society through bourgeois marriage” (11).

We also find loss of sisterhood in Ama’s story. The submission of her mother to her husband makes the two women separate. Ama knows about the man oppressing her mother and she wants to help her, but the latter pushes her away obliging her to leave Lagos and later on Nigeria to go to the Red District of Antwerp to own money with which she can afford an independent life. There are two major instances, among others, that show how Ama and her mother lose connection. The first is when Ama fights with her step-father and her mother after confessing about her rape. After the fight, Ama asks her mother who her real father is, “but her demand had been met with a lamentation that she was an ungrateful child. A wicked child whose sole aim in life was to ruin her mother’s life” (150). The woman blames her daughter who is a victim of rape instead of comforting her. Another instance is when Ama leaves the house because she is obliged. Ama thinks that “She could not be sorry to be leaving her mother. *What has she ever done for me? She let that man rule her, let him ruin my life. She did nothing. Nothing to help me. What sort of a mother is that?*” (136). The carelessness of her mother leaves Ama cold-hearted and miserable. This is why Linda Gordon (1979) says: “willing mothers would be better parent, wanted children better people” (112).

We believe that patriarchy is the reason for loss of sisterhood; Gimenez explains that in the capitalist patriarchal societies, even social groups are themselves divided into classes (27-28). In the narrative, when Ama goes to Mama Eko’s, she receives the love and affection she needs because the woman is independent. Contrary to her mother who “walked in a deliberate state of blindness” (133) and is a silent extension to her husband (145) as Ama desperately realizes later. Mama Eko takes good care of her. She worries about her when Dele offers her a job abroad, and she supports her when she makes her decision to take the job and leave (164-69). Despite this love, Ama feels victimized, so she chooses to run away.

The story of Ama demonstrates not only the tyranny of her step-father, but also the prevailing sexist ideology in African society, notably with the man in the *Eggzecutive* bus. Patriarchal/male violence against women and dominance are institutionalized, and this can be seen through power relationships between male and female characters in private as well as public spheres. When Ama is in her way to Mama Eko in Lagos, a woman with a baby in her hands begs for money in the bus station. The conductor cries “ ‘ga, go and tell the man that got you pregnant to look after you. Anu ofia. Wild animal. If you spread easily like butter, you get what you deserve’ ” (139). The man treats the woman as a wild animal, for them if a woman is not married and has a child she is an animal. The woman sitting next to Ama tries to defend her, but the majority of the passengers contradict her saying that it is in man’s nature to desire a woman, and it is up to the woman to control herself (139). By saying this, Unigwe means that in a society where men rule, women are the only victims, and only few know that while the majority accepts the fact that women should go in the direction men decide because they are the dominated gender.

Spivak says that “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” (82). In the sense that, women’s subordination is an ideology indoctrinated in men and society as a whole. It is a part of their culture. She also adds that in the context of colonialism and post colonialism, the subaltern (as the proletariat) has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female, for her, is more deeply in shadow (83). This means that if the colonizers have silenced their colonies, the ideology in these colonies have silenced women even more. And this is, in fact, what we can see through Unigwe’s novel. According to Spivak, Freud’s use of women as scapegoats aggravates the subalternity of women and transforms them into subjects of hysteria, and “our efforts to give the subaltern a voice in history will be doubly open to the dangers run by Freud’s discourse” (92), a discourse that influence men. What is sad in the story is that many women are unconscious and passive like the woman sitting across the aisle

from Ama. She confirms the ideology by telling a story of her neighbor's daughter who is raped. She says proudly: " 'why would she not be raped? . . . Dresses that showed her thighs. Blouses that stuck to her' " (139). Instead of being supportive to the girl and blame men who are perverts, the woman puts the blame on the girl who shows some skin. The woman beside Ama simply replies that men are the ones to blame, but the majority are against her. Her reply reproduces misogynist stereotypes. Here, in the talk of the women beside Ama, we feel like it is Unigwe's voice who defends the dignity of women that is despised for years in a society of men transforming women into silent properties that take the blame for what irresponsible men do. Everyone is against the woman, just as the majority of writings about women by men who portray them as angels of the house and sex objects.

Loss of sisterhood can also be felt through the character of Alek (Joyce) when she arrives at the refugee camp after being savagely gang-raped by soldiers. She tells that a United Nations female worker "did not blink as she listened to [her] story" (194). Alek is also disappointed because she thinks that someone would pity her, but she finds out that in the refugee camp everyone is victim and prisoner of her/his own story. It is not only the UN worker who despises Alek, but also her boyfriend's mother. Polycarp' mother represents the traditional woman who strongly believes in social hierarchy and supremacy of one race over another. She does not love Alek because she wants a local wife for her son. The man cannot disobey his parents even if he loves Alek. He tells Alek sadly about his father and "of a grief that would crush him if [he] did not give him an Igbo daughter-in-law. And of obligations" (225).

Kwatsha explains how important and necessary marriage is in Africa and argues that "the tradition of forcing a child to marry a man or woman that he/she does not love, clearly reflects the way in which men, in particular, abuse their powerful position in society" (154). The Westerners, according to Bandarage, believe that the reasons of Third World

underdevelopment are its traditions and values (497). Caste-based discrimination and racism exist in African societies and are, in fact, major reasons of human trafficking. Joyce is led to prostitution because her fiancé introduced her to Dele, the pimp.

## 2. Capitalism

Capitalism is another reason that immerses women in poverty and oppression. Chielozone Eze says: “To be sure, the objectification of women’s bodies is not specific to the African experience. It is rather the ultimate result of a global Capitalist system of which Africa and Africans have become a part, but patriarchy does as much harm” (94). This means that seeing women as objects of pleasure is a global ideology that results from the capitalist system. The latter also aggravates their position as low-paid workers. With globalization of economy, Africa becomes part of this mold; however, patriarchy has, in fact, the same result on women, so we would rather agree with Eze’s view. Gayatri Spivak is also a scholar from the Third World who speaks about the socio-economic conditions of women. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” she argues that women from high class as well as women from lower classes are aware of the plausibility of global alliance but cannot say anything. She says: “in their case, the denial and withholding of consumerism and the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations” (84). Former scholars and writers such as Bondarage also discuss this reason. The latter argues that poverty comes from the exploitation of Capitalism that “puts profits of a few before the human needs of the many” (500), While “the home seems to be the province of women everywhere” (502). Thus, in the western as in the third world countries, Capitalism has caused the feminization of poverty (499).

Mitchell, also from her part, argues that “[women] are fundamental to the human condition, yet in their economic, social, and political roles, they are marginal” (11).

According to her, home is the universe of women and it is culture that attributes this ideology (Ibid). Spivak, from her side claims that colonialism renders the Third World transparent (67). To mean that colonizers impose their culture, ideology, and way of life on their colonies discarding, thus, any existing or local culture. About the oppression of women Spivak writes: “for the ‘figure’ of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class differences are subsumed under that charge” (82). To mean that, apart from being silenced because they are colonized, women as part of society are more silenced because they are victims of patriarchy. Spivak does not approve patriarchy but she discloses the consequences it has on women by aggravating their subalternity. By this, we think she tries to open women’s eyes and encourage them to react and take the lead. This is, indeed, what happens since Third World countries women are more active.

Many African women tackled the problem of patriarchy and women’s oppression in Africa. Spivak claims that as exploited subjects, even intellectuals cannot interpret texts of females putting them doubly in shadow (84). She also explains that if the subaltern cannot represent itself and cannot be represented by intellectuals, then “there is no representable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself” (80). Chika Unigwe, however, broke these rules, as many other twenty first century female writers who raised their voices against male dominance. She made sure to put this ahead in her novel *On Black Sisters’ Street*. In fact, there are many instances where she shows that women, either single or spouses, have no voice in the African society in general and the Nigerian one especially.

### **2.1. Capitalism in *On Black Sisters’ Street***

Another reason that pushes the four protagonists of Unigwe to the world of decay is poverty that results from the globalization of Capitalism which is another form of imperialism. Spivak writes: “the phased development of the subaltern is complicated by the

imperialist project” (78). According to Monica O’Connor and Grainne Healy, not only is gender inequality in the realm of Capitalism the cause of such outcomes, but there is also poverty. Even though poverty is not only for women, they are the most vulnerable victims that traffickers target to drag them to sexual exploitation (4). This is what Unigwe shows in her novel. The girls live in a world where money is power, and their economic situations make them long for a change, especially with globalization. They crave for things that they cannot reach; consequently, the four protagonists bring themselves to Antwerp to work as forced prostitutes. Spivak in fact writes that with the globalization of capitalism the comprador countries (Third World) assure a cheap labor (83). When women try to express their oppression, the political figures as well as patriarchs render the problem of women transparent hindering, thus, the subaltern from speaking (Spivak 90-1).

Sisi/Chisom, for instance, has a university degree and is ambitious: “Chisom said, ‘I’m glad I’ve graduated’. For she is looking forward for a realization of everything dreamed. . . . Dreams she had carried every since she is old enough to want a life different from her parents’ ” (18). Her father always encourages her to carry on her studies because “ ‘the only way to better life is education’ ” (Ibid). Sisi is convinced that education is the key to happiness and wealth. She dreams of leaving Lagos, having a big house for her parents, a fancy car and luxurious house; however, when she applies for many jobs in the two years that follow her graduation, she finds herself “watching with anger as life laughed at the grandiosity of her dreams” (23). Her boyfriend Pete is as poor as her this is why, when she gets the offer from Dele, she decides to “get her own back on life . . . there was no way she was going to turn it down” (23). She sees the corrupt Nigeria and the conditions in which she and her family live so she takes the job even though she does not like the way Dele looks at her. She decides to go abroad, earn money, and come back to Lagos with wealth to realize her dreams; “[for] if she stayed back, if she let this chance slip she would only be giving life the go-ahead to treat

her dreams with derision” (89). However, she does not know about the conditions that are waiting for her in Antwerp.

Just as Sisi has problems of poverty and corruption, Efe suffers the same with herself, alone, responsible for her three siblings and her alcoholic father. She needs money to afford a decent life for them. In addition to that, she loves fancy things that she cannot afford, so when she has the chance to realize all her needs, she does not turn it down even if the man who makes her happy is her father’s age. She is sixteen when she first has sex with Titus, a wealthy man that gives her money for pleasing him. She offers her body to an old man to buy her luxuries. In this part, there is a reference to class struggle and a desire to look like rich people. Like Sisi, Efe has dreams, “when *she* was rich, she mused she would build herself a house with its own bathroom” (55). Living a western- like life, she would buy her sister earrings and buy other “bits of happiness” (56). This is why, “if Titus was what she had to endure to get the things she wanted then so it be” (58).

Money, however, turns Efe’s life into something she does not expect when she is pregnant, and Titus leaves her to struggle to take care of her child alone. So now, she has another reason to flee her country. Even though she works three different jobs (one of them is at Dele’s) to have more money, she still needs more to save her child. For her child, she accepts to become a prostitute because Dele knows about her conditions when she works for him as a cleaner, thus he takes the opportunity to attract her into the trafficked world of prostitution, “people knew the risks and people took them because the destination was worth it” (82). She knows that she would prostitute herself in Antwerp but she thinks that “L.I was a worthy enough investment to encourage her to accept Dele’s offer” (Ibid).

Contrary to Sisi and Efe, Ama has another reason for fleeing Nigeria. Her family is not poor, but her step-father is a bully and predator, she wants to go abroad, “she imagined telling people she lived in Las Vegas” (135). So globalization and shattered dreams because of

patriarchy, are her reasons for her chosen journey in Antwerp. She is aware of the corruption of Nigeria and hypocrisy of people through her step-father. She knows that money makes of people monsters trampling over poor ones. The corruption of the city prevents her from passing the JAMB exam that would allow her study in a university of her choice (146). When working at Mama Eko, she meets rich women taking care of their appearance, having nice haircuts, expensive clothes, manicures and pedicures she fancies that “. . . while a professional hairdresser wore expensive extensions into her hair” (161). For this reason, she goes to see Dele to work. He tells her about the nature of the work saying “ ‘what kin’ job I go dey want fine, fine women to do for me? . . . I tink say you na mature woman’ ” (165). Ama takes it as an offense first but when she looks back at the life she has, the one she would love to have, and her experience with her step-father she assumes that Brother Cyril did it without question, so doing it for money is better, especially that it is overseas “which earned you respect just for being there” (166).

Joyce’s narrative is the last to which readers are exposed in Unigwe’s novel. She is a survivor of genocide in the Sudanese civil war. Joyce, from her birth name Alek, loves to behave like a boy since a young age. However her family imposed a “ladylike” behavior on her. Her mother always imposes domestic chores on her like cooking and cleaning, “*do not play football, Alek, it’s not ladylike. Do not sit around playing awolet, it’s for men only*” (185). This is what her parents tell her because the society is patriarchal and women are fit to become housewives only. Her mother teaches her also the importance of virginity telling her “marriage first. And then touching” (186). Alek’s parents want to leave Dinka town to go live in Khartoum or in western country because there are more commodities there. In the midst of a civil war the people of her village are preparing to flee before the Janjaweed Militia army arrive to kill them, unfortunately Alek’s family perish before making it. Unigwe expresses patriarchy of men in Sudan too through the voice of Alek who is shocked when she hears her

father beg the soldiers to let them go before they kill them. “Alek had never heard her father sound like that: timid, servile” (189). This is because men are never servile to their wives or children, they are the superior gender. After killing her parents and her brother, the soldiers rape Alek one after the other leaving her destroyed and her dreams of going to university and becoming a doctor shattered (194).

After some months spent in the refugee camp, Alek starts to restore faith in life and love after meeting a Nigerian soldier named Polycarp, he takes her to live with him in Lagos. (214). after two years of relation, Polycarp confesses about his duty towards his parents as to marry an Igbo girl. In order to help her and get rid of her at the same time, Polycarp introduces Alek to Dele who changes her name to Joyce. The former promises to pay the visa fees monthly. This is maybe done out of pity or just to take the burden off his shoulders. Alek is promised to be sent abroad by Dele, but she does not know where. All she knows is that she would be working as a nanny, “ ‘make you go look after people. Nanny work’, the fat man told her” (231). Alek is angry enough and faced enough deceptions in her life that she decides not to argue or even ask questions, “she did not ask why she needed a change of name to be able to babysit children” (Ibid). She sees Polycarp who acts like a pet to Dele who is rich. He agrees with every suggestion he gives, agrees with every decision, and laugh to every joke that Joyce finds stupid.

### **Conclusion**

Chika Unigwe has been able to make a parallel between patriarchy and the good side of globalization as imagined by the four protagonists. They dreamt of all the benefits of globalization like wealth, success, and travelling to show that they are the main reasons why the four protagonists of *On Black Sisters' Street* left their country to go work abroad and become victims of sex trafficking. Maybe globalization permits the women to realize the situation of their home country; the oppression women suffer from and corruption, making

them long for a change. Maybe it permits them leave their countries looking for a better life, nevertheless, it turns out to be a misfortune in the disguise of a blessing.

**Chapter Three:**  
**Sex-Trafficking as a Consequence of Capitalist- Patriarchy**  
**and Globalization in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street***

**Introduction**

The present chapter attempts to study the consequences of a capitalist-patriarchal world on the four protagonists of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, mainly their conditions as forced prostitutes who believe that globalized economy might help them find happiness and wealth. Globalization, capitalism, and patriarchy have dramatic consequences on women and are the main reasons of human and sex trafficking.

**Sex Trafficking and Globalization**

Globalization, according to Elina Penttinen, in her book *Globalization, Prostitution, and Sex-Trafficking: Corporeal Politics*, is enacted in everyone's life in the kind of opportunities, constraints, and necessities it generates. It permits the girls to travel and work abroad (1). Based on her study of Russian and Baltic girls working in Finland, she observes that "before globalization and the breaking down of the Soviet borders, there were no such possibilities for Russian or Baltic women to travel and work abroad" (1). Similarly, Okalie O. James<sup>6</sup> in "A Study on Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation within the Gulf of Guinea Countries", believes that human trafficking prevails thanks to globalization that increases the economic situation of some countries (104). When they get the chance, girls imagine a great world outside.

Many committed Nigerian women of the twenty first century are writing about the conditions of women in Diaspora, especially women who are hoodwinked by traffickers and

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<sup>6</sup>Omorie Pat Iziengbe, Modupe Adeleye, Akokuwebe. M Ezomazino, and Okolie O. James are all writers who wrote different articles gathered in a book entitled *Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Nigeria*. In collaboration with *Fond de solidarité Prioritaire of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. It is a study conducted between October 2015 and June 2016, but there is no accurate date of its publication.

live the ordeal abroad. Unoma Azuah and Sefi Atta, two young African writers, are determined to show clearly the realities of female migrants' lives, and expose the traumatic difficulties black female migrants experience abroad.

This is, in fact, what Chika Unigwe represents in her novel *On Black Sisters' Street* through the stories of Sisi, Ema, Efe, and Joyce. The narrator says: "Before Efe came to Belgium, she imagined castles and clean streets . . . but now . . . she describes it as a botched dream" (24). Efe knows the nature of her work in Belgium; however, she does not really know what is waiting for her until she arrives there. Sisi too is disappointed when she discovers how the "Zwartzusterstraat wore a look of a much maligned childless wife in a polygamous house . . . the house itself was not much to look at either. Truth be told, it was a disappointment" (99). Sisi finds herself in a house with "five bedrooms not much bigger than telephone booths" (Ibid), contrary to what Dele promised her in Lagos. She tells herself that "she had no choice but to leave" (118). Nothing good is left for her to do in her home country. Amidst all this disappointment, she still thinks Belgium is good especially that Madam tells her: " 'Europe is for living, and living in full it's an opportunity' " (117).

Penttinen argues that globalization impacts on the marginalization of women that are defined by their sexuality; however, the world ignores, according to her, that women contribute to globalization by their cheap labor in the global assembly line (4); sex-trafficking is a result of "shadow globalization" (7). This is why the work of women is not acknowledged (9). According to Penttinen, trafficked women should not be called prostitutes because they are a corporeal result of globalization (16). As an illustration, "the Russian prostitute, moving in and out of Finland, embodies these processes of globalization in her movement in between borders and to different places, using her body to do the work of the globalized sex industry" (55). Globalization, therefore, provides the position for men to travel and buy sex and for

women to serve (64). It also emphasizes the objectification of women and their dependence on men.

Penttinen tackles also another point that Unigwe portrays in her novel. She says: “it is important also to note that most of the Russian and Baltic women do not think of themselves as prostitutes; they rather think they are doing this ‘work’ or ‘business’ for the time being to gain money and to better their lives” (75). Here, Penttinen does not defend human trafficking, she rather uncovers the tactics traffickers use and impose on girls to make them believe that they are their saviors. For them prostitution is a way to cope with globalization. Trafficked girls see their traffickers as people who help them exactly as we find in Unigwe’s novel; Dele who takes himself for a good man who “ ‘just dey try to help poor gals’ ” (295). When he meets Sisi in the hairdressing salon, he says: “ ‘she dey go work. You wan’ go too? You wan’ go abroad too?’ ” (32). He makes her believe he is her savior, and this is in fact what the narrator writes later, “she owed him her life” (48). Sisi is ready to go start a new life and set her future bravely; she thinks of Dele as a blessing. Ama too, in a conversation with Joyce after the death of Sisi, says: “ ‘Oga Dele just wanted to help. What choice did we have back home, eh? Oga Dele is trying to give us happiness’ ” (113-14). Ama and Efe see the opportunity that Dele gives them as a sign of caring and they have no other choices. What they do not know, though, is that they are the ones making Dele happy by sending him money monthly to fill his bank accounts. The only woman who does not think so is Joyce saying: “ ‘and are we happy?’ ” (114). They do not realize the conditions of their work until they arrive there.

Penttinen makes it clear that only a few people acknowledge that some prostitutes are actually trafficked and live in misery because of poverty and unemployment. Few also acknowledge that these women are controlled by their pimps and traffickers (94). She

explains that “it is globalization that makes this event” (97) especially that she knows that some actual sex trafficking takes place in backyards of victims’ houses and in private homes.

According to Arundhati Roy, in her book *Power Politics*, it is the duty of writers and other artists to spread awareness about the dangers of globalization because they have the right to free speech thanks to civil societies of powerful countries (7). However, she is skeptical about the degree of freedom artists have since they are restricted by corruption and sign value (8). Nevertheless, she argues that these artists should take sides and defend their opinions. This for her starts by the self. She writes “and this time, unlike the struggle for independence, we won’t have the luxury of fighting a colonizing ‘enemy’. We’ll be fighting ourselves” (12). She is extremely against the globalization of hate, pain, and oppression. Instead, she writes “the only thing worth globalizing is dissent” (33). To mean that there should be freedom of speech and mini-narratives should be heard.

Another important reason that fosters sex trafficking is the need for money. The four protagonists in *On Black Sisters’ Street* are weak; their liability and excitement for a better life lead them astray. As a consequence of their poverty, lack of alternatives, and globalization, they are trafficked by Dele to work as forced prostitutes in Belgium for a huge sum of money. Dele tells the four women: “ ‘so it go cost you taty’ousand euro it go cost you o’ ” (34), and he continues saying that “ ‘No when you get there, begin work, you go begin dey pay me. Installment payment we dey call am! Mont by mont’ you go dey pay me’ ” (35). Many of the traffickers, before going to a potential victim, look at their socio-economic state. Avekadvie P. Mano explains, in his article, “An Innovative Approach to Sex Trafficking Research”, that the trafficked prostitutes “come from poor socio-economic situations, were young, attractive” (49). This means that the traffickers look at the women through their physique, they look for young and attractive girls; this point is pointed at by Unigwe in two instances. When Sisi sees Dele for the first time in the hairdressing salon, he brings with him

a young girl that Sisi sees as “she could not have been more than seventeen” (31). She later adds on “the young girl –all bones except for a huge pair of breasts- was quiet” (Ibid). Here we see clearly that the girl is chosen for her age and physique. The second instance where Unigwe confirms Mano’s statement is when Madam sees Sisi for the first time she exclaims: “ ‘Dele was right about you. Ah, that man knows his stuff. He never disappoints. He has the better girls on show, you know?’ ” (118).

Girls are seen as objects for commercial benefit. Indeed, Spivak explains the oppression that women suffer from. She says: “the question of ‘woman’ seems more problematic in this context [to agree with Unigwe’s view]. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways” (90). This to mean that a woman is not oppressed through her race only, but also through her class. Hence, for Spivak as hard as may a woman try to speak herself in the realm of imperialism or patriarchy, they need more efforts from feminists, thus, “the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (Ibid).

We cannot talk about females’ sexuality without making reference to feminists. In fact, sex trafficking has been subject of a long debate between feminists. According to Gregg Aronson in “Seeking a Consolidated Feminist Voice for Prostitutes in the U.S.”, each doctrine’s solution collides with the other, this is why feminist schools of thought vowed not to cooperate (357). Each doctrine demands something that is different or even opposed, sometimes, to another doctrine. As an example, on the account of Sheila Jeffreys in her article “Prostitution, Trafficking, and Feminism: An Update on the Debate”, in the academy of “sex-work” positions, not all feminists see prostitution as a subordination anymore. She claims that the liberal feminists are “sex-positive” and see prostitution as a form of freedom while radical feminists are “sex-negative” conceiving prostitution worsening the dominance of men (316). According to Jeffreys, sexual liberation joined with the economic ideology of neo-liberalism from 1980 to 2000 have deemed prostitution legal, especially that it is profitable. Yes,

because as we have seen before, sex trafficking is a very lucrative business. She argues that girls who are trafficked abroad earn well below the average wage in Western countries (Ibid).

This is why Marxist-feminists, according to Sarah Bromberg in *Feminist Issues in Prostitution*, see the reality of prostitutes as oppressed workers reinforcing an exploitative capitalist scheme. This is, unfortunately the case of the protagonists of Unigwe in her novel who are deprived of the money they work for. Thus, the radical feminists, according to Jeffreys, come to advocate the criminalization of such exploitation (316). Gregg Aronson fosters this idea. For him, the radical feminists created Women Hurt In System of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt (WHISPER) in 1985 representing all prostitutes, especially the street ones (370). Same as Jeffreys, Aronson argues that the radical feminists contradict the liberal ones who believe that prostitution is a choice (370). By Aronson's account, WHISPER argues that prostitution is another type of sexual exploitation of women by men (371). He also claims that WHISPER seeks to penalize and criminalize those who harm prostitutes and the noxious contributors to this crime as pimps, costumers and so on (371-72).

According to Jeffreys, many writers such as Musto, Linon Celli and others criticize the clashing positions of radical feminists (also called the abolitionists), and the liberal feminists. She writes that "these authors want the abolitionists to desist so that the 'sex-work' position in their own interpretation can hold sway" (317). For Jeffreys, the fact that socialist-feminists focus on the general economic process and do not name the male dominance as a problem is a shame (Ibid). However, Bromberg explains that the socialist feminists are close to Marxist-feminists in adopting the tenets of Marxism, but they focus more on the psychological and social roots of female oppression rather than the economy. Here, we see a kind of contradiction between the two doctrines. Radical feminists think that the socialist feminists focus on economy, but the latter deny it. For Bromberg, socialist-feminists see prostitutes as victims of the social corruption which accompanies class distinction. Being it Jeffreys or

Bromberg, both writers believe that radical feminists seek legal reformations for women's prostitution while others do not. For Bromberg, the socialist-feminists "believe that the cause of prostitution is in the structuring of society, and that is where the solution will reside."

Aronson, from his part, studies the position and demands of socialist feminists through the English Collective Prostitutes (ECP) organization created in 1975 by prostitutes and ex-prostitutes. According to him, ECP argues that poverty is the reason of prostitution and believes that ". . . it is the lack of money in women's hands that is immoral and criminal, not the act of prostitution" (368). This might confirm Jeffrey's thoughts. Contrary to Bromberg who claims that the socialist feminists do not seek legal reforms, Aronson claims that the ECP support stern criminal laws against pimps and also believe that rechanneling money into women's hands is the solution (369). Jeffrey from her side contradicts this belief. For her it is not poverty that is the cause of prostitution but the fact that there are no ready markets for men's bodies and women are not buyers of sex. Hence, "male dominance constructs prostitution, and inequality makes particular categories of women vulnerable to sexual exploitation" (317). This confirms the Marxist-feminists ideology.

According to Jeffrey, writers like Muslo, Segrave and others believe that sex trafficking is as a "migration for labor" that should not be banned, however Jeffrey disagrees saying: "the determination to downplay the significance of prostitution as an end point of trafficking, represents a deliberate determination to ignore the elephant in the room" (318). While the authors she studies accuse the radical feminists of being prudish and moralistic, Jeffrey affirms that this doctrine studies violence against women "because it ignores the pleasure and personhood of the woman whose body is used, and she disassociates emotionally from her body to survive" (Ibid). This is exactly the case with Sisi, Efe, Joyce, and Ama who give up their dignity and freedom to help their loves ones and themselves.

According to Laurie Shrage, another feminist, in “Comment on Overall’s ‘What’s Wrong with Prostitution? Evaluating Sex Work’” Christine Overall believes that the capitalist patriarchy system has created many forms of labor and social inequalities nevertheless, prostitution is a different form from these ones (564). Overall trusts that contrary to other forms of housework, prostitution is commoditized, thus “unlike ‘housework’ or ‘child work’ to treat sex as sex work is to treat it as a commodity” (365). So, providing pleasure for me is considered to be a job the women are more fit for. If we follow Overall’s view, we may notice that she is, somehow, for this characterization. In addition to that, Christine Overall, according to Shrage, requires also pernicious forms of social inequality because the buyer is socially privileged by class, gender, race, and age than the sex seller (Ibid). Shrage criticizes Overall, who generalizes the situation of prostitutes in all capitalist patriarch societies forgetting about the non-industrial and non-western ones. Thus, for Shrage, Overall’s analysis applies beyond the parameters she has specified (566-67).

Another error that Shrage detects in Overall’s analysis is the nature of sex work that differs from other forms of women’s labor. Shrage disagrees explaining that if sex is called “work” because it is commoditized, then why is cooking, for example, called “house-work” while it is not commoditized? She writes, “the cultural constitution of sex as work, and thus prostitution as an occupation, need not depend on capitalist forms of exchange, as Overall’s account implies” (568). To mean that Overall’s idea is just an ideology and not an economic belief. For Jeffrey, trafficked prostitutes fit the characteristics of the *UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery* (1956) this is why they are considered as slaves. Either forced or aware of their profession, but unaware of the force and control that will be exercised over them, all victims, according to Jeffrey, have debt bondage, which is the *sin qua non* of trafficking (319). This is why the author esteems necessary to eradicate these harmful practices as soon

as possible because “the creation of prostitution culture is harmful to the health and happiness of girls and young women” (Ibid). Fortunately, as she assumes, many countries have introduced legislations penalizing male buyers such as Norway, Sweden, South Korea and others (319).

Avekadvie P. Mano explains the reasons why girls are easy victims for the traffickers; he writes that “poverty, lack of income-earning opportunities, having dependents, being single mothers” (49-50). This is the situation to which Unigwe answers through Sisi’s lack of job opportunities, and having her parents depending on her. Efe, too, is a single mother and also having her child and siblings depending on her. In Nigeria and the Guinea countries, Modupe Adeleye explains that most of the victims of trafficking are attracted by the luxurious image that traffickers draw to them to convince them accept their offer (30) as Dele does with Sisi, Efe, Joyce, and Ama by attracting them just by names of celebrities or European cities. Okolie O. James adds into this patriarchy, gender inequality, and sexual assault as reasons opening the gates for sex trafficking (102).

Mano takes the example of sex-trafficking in Belize saying that “women remain in Belize because the money earned far exceeds what they would have earned in their own countries with the state” (43). They are really obliged to work, not because they like the job, but because they have to save themselves. In a research conducted by Omoregie Pat Izengbe from 2015 to 2016 about prostitution in Benin, the scholar reports that “findings revealed that 12 women out of 15 of the survivors admitted they were aware of the nature of the job” however, they do not choose it because it pleases them, but because they are in need (6). Penttinen joins Izengbe in this statement saying that “the trafficked women or foreign prostitutes who sell sex because of economic necessity would not count as prostitutes as they do it out of necessity and not professionally” (18).

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!*’ ” (Ibid). 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.

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 (Ibid). 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).

When talking about increase of sexual trafficking in border communities, Adeleye maintains that situational factors like childhood experience of parental abuse or neglect (like Ama who is raped by her step-father at eight years old and neglected by her mother) and early tolerance of exchange of sex (like Efe who loses her virginity at the age of sixteen and becomes a mother) are some of other reasons of increase of sex trafficking (32). While traffickers attract their victims by promising them good jobs abroad to have a better life, like Dele does with Joyce, once the victims abroad. Karen G. Jayson in “Human Trafficking in North Carolina: Human Trafficking as a Commodity” (2013) says that victims have their papers confiscated by the company or the trafficker who sends them abroad, leaving the person an illegal immigrant owing huge amounts of money for the company that assures their passage. This victim, thus, is forced to work as a prostitute to pay back her fees (4). Following this idea, when Sisi decides to go tell the police about Madam and Dele, she remembers that “she was an illegal immigrant after all. And so were the rest” (274). The same reaction goes with Joyce too when she arrives to Zwartzusterstraat asking about the children she is taking care of, and “Madam laughed so hard that tears streamed down her face and said, ‘which children? Which *yeye* children?’ ” (233). Joyce is completely shattered, but she cannot do anything because she has “no passport, no money. What was she to do?” (234). Similarly, Madam tells Sisi “ ‘not nervous are we? You can’t afford to be. Not in our business . . . ah, hand over your passport. From now until your debt is paid I am in charge of it’ ” (118-19). From that moment on, Sisi as well as the three other protagonists, know that everything is to be imposed on her.

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). This principle idea exists also in Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* when Efe says: “they- Madam Dollar and Baron- never gave me money. They always claim I would get no money until I had paid my debt” (133).<sup>7</sup> So this is why, according to Jayson, victims are afraid to denounce themselves. The *UN Trafficking In persons Report* of 2018 explains that the fear for themselves as well as their family members prevent them from denouncing the traffickers (9), and also because they are threatened by their captors according to Bishop (117). Unigwe does not miss this characteristic of trafficking as well, she shows it through Dele when he speaks to Sisi saying: “ ‘No try cross me o. Nobody dey cross Senghor Dele!’ ” (42). And this is what she remembers every time she heads to work, when Sisi sometimes thinks of not working, she thinks about Dele and his voice pounding in her ears, so “she practices a smile” and goes to work (247). This characteristics is also shown in media with movies about human trafficking like *Human Trafficking 2005*, a movie directed by Christian Duguay in 2005. We can see one of the victims, Elena, threatened by the trafficker by the life of her daughter Ivanka.

Bishop claims that pimps who use domination over the prostitutes are traffickers, especially if the house where they live has rules. In fact, after accepting Dele's offer, Sisi finds herself in a place where she has no control over her life anymore, Madam tells her: “

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<sup>7</sup>This extract is taken from a PhD dissertation written by Nder, O. Matthias in 2013 entitled *The Experience of Nigerian Ladies in the International Sex-Trafficking and Prostitution: a Reading of AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo's Trafficked*. P 21.

‘my dear Sisi, it’s not your place to ask questions here. You just do as you’re told and you’ll have an easy ride. I talk, you listen. You understand?’ ” (120). She finds herself in complete servitude contrary to what she has thought. Bishop says that “one common rule is the nightly quota, which requires the girl to make a certain amount of earning every evening” (120). In the case of the women in *On Black Sisters Street*, it is a monthly quota as it is explained in the novel: “ ‘every month we expect five hundred euros from you’ ” Madam tells Sisi and the other girls (183). And the girls have to make it because if not, Madam threatens saying: “ ‘any month you don’t pay ...’ she lets the throat hang, unspoken, yet menacing” (183). Bishop also argues that adding to this injustice, the girls rarely get to keep any of the money because it is all given to the trafficker (120). Actually, Unigwe also portrays this idea well when she writes, “Sisi had barely any money left over after paying off Dele” (252). And not only that, Sisi has no right to slow down working, this is what madam makes her understand when she tells her, “ ‘you’ve still got many years to work oo. Don’t start slowing down now,’ she cautioned” (265). The trafficker is in fact “fleecing them” (274). In my opinion this is what Marx makes reference to when saying: “the more objects the worker produces, the less he can possess and the more he falls under the domination of his product, capital” (87).

According to Bishop, the traffickers use tactics to gain the trust of their victims by seducing them; they play with the mental of the girls needing attention and affection promising them a better life. After gaining their trust, they exploit them (128). This argument is better explained by Monica O’Connor and Grainne Healy. They say the trafficker starts by ensnaring the girls, then they move to impressing them, then they create a kind of dependence including changing the name like what Dele does with Sisi and Joyce, and at last they move to take control over the girls on whom they have total dominance (8). In the case of Unigwe’s protagonists, it is Madam who has their passports. Indeed, Dele, before sending the girls to Belgium, gets to know them and seduce them first. With Efe for example, Unigwe writes,

“Dele would also turn out to be the most generous of her three bosses . . . he often compliments her, noticing when she has her hair done” (80). He makes her feel confident and at ease with him. Same with Joyce, Dele first lies to her about the nature of the job, then by convincing her that he tries to help her, “ ‘she sabi how many people dey wan’ opportunity like dis?’ ” (232). Just as Dele, Madam and her right hand Segun make the girls feel as ease to the point where when Segun is about to kill Sisi, this latter does not suspect anything, “she was not scared of Segun. He was harmless, everyone knew it” (293).

Devin Brewer in “Globalization and Human Trafficking” suggests that the traffickers build their fortunes over the backs of vulnerable victims. Their bodies are exploited and they are not considered as human beings who have rights. Unigwe gives voice to her protagonists to express this injustice. Ama says “ ‘somebody has just died, a human being...’ ” (38). The narrator writes: “nobody says it but they are all aware that the fact that Madam is going about her normal business is upsetting them” (39). Unigwe gives voice to Joyce to say: “ ‘we’re human beings! Why should we take it? Sisi is dead and all Madam can think of is business. Doesn’t Sisi deserve respect from her?’ ” (283). Then she adds, “ ‘Madam has no right to our bodies, and neither does Dele’ ” (290). They state openly that they do not want to do this anymore but they have no other choice but to stay because they know no one will help them. Okalie James says: “the commodification of girls and women involved in prostitution reduces their worth as humans” (122).

Another aspect that fosters sex-trafficking is demand. Unigwe shows this in her novel through the voice of the trafficker Dele who says: “and as for liking black women, Dele had told her they were in great demand by white men” (84). And when Sisi is killed he tells the Madam: “ ‘Na good worker we lose but gals full *bokufor* Lagos. I get three lined up. Latest next week, dem visa go ready’ ” (295). Brewer claims that Human Trafficking remains a matter of demand and supply (46). In the same vein, O’Connor and Healy think that “the root

cause of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation is the male demand for women and girls who can be bought and sexually exploited” (10). Another scholar who shares this opinion is Mano saying: “sex-trafficking is geared towards maximizing profits, with slave trading characterizing the supply side of the market, while slavery accounts for the demand side of the equilibrium” (42). O. James claims that sex trafficking meets the global demands of sex slavery (102).

In fact, demand is what makes of human trafficking a lucrative business. O’Connor and Healy claim that “whether he is submissive, flattering, or abusive the client’s treatment of the prostitute represents a denial of her subjectivity and humanity” (10). Truly, “the johns” as Bishop calls them (121), are the dominants, and this is what Madam tells the girls in *On Black Sisters’ Street*, “they pay to get what they want” (206), the men see women as objects for sexual pleasure only, as sex toys. She also adds, “ ‘as long as he’s paying for your services, he’s the king. His wish is your command and you do what he wants to. No complaints’ ” (275). In her first experience, Sisi is not comfortable when she walks into a bar with Madam, “ ‘smile,’ Madam whispered furiously to her” (208). Sisi forced herself to smile even if she was sinking, she regrets being there but she thinks, “She was not doing this because she liked it. . . . But she was here now and there was no going back” (208-9). She realizes that she is not in her life anymore because she lives something that is imposed on her and she cannot go back until she pays all her debts. “At least she was doing it for money. She had no other choice” (210). Even the clothes she wears are not something that she “would ever have picked out herself. Not even for this job” (202). She does not have the right to choose neither her clothes, nor her clients. But “she tried to calm herself by dressing with an enthusiasm she did not feel” (201). She is very disappointed especially when she recalls that she has a degree.

O’Connor and Healy talk about rape and constant exploitation in non-consensual prostitution saying: “if rape is defined as any unwanted sex act, then prostitution has an

extremely high rate of rape” (14). 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). Sisi is raped because she asks the man to stop many times, but he forces her to have an intercourse. The same thing for Joyce who has a client whom she cannot stand (179) but she is forced to sleep with him.

Mano defines sex trafficking as a business oriented activity that has the intention to “secure maximum monetary rewards through the exploitation of vulnerable people” (40). However, this crime goes hand in hand with corrupt authorities assuring impunity to the trafficker. In *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Dele tells Sisi “ ‘I get plenty connections there. Plenty, plenty!’ ” (34). And like the narrator writes, “Like Madam. Efe would have some police officers on her patrol to ensure the security of her girls and of her business” (279). We know that there is complicity between the police officers of Belgium and the pimps when Ama tells Efe and Joyce, “ ‘Madam has the police in her pocket’ ” (290). Mano argues that it is generally agreed that corrupt officers are essential components of the process facilitating it by allowing traffickers to bring foreign women to local bars and brothels. In bars clients and patrons pay expensive drinks to the prostitute and provide more clients to the pimps through the women (47). Same in the bar where Sisi goes on her first day of service. Madam tells the barman “ ‘You give me business, I give you business’ ” (207).

In addition to that, Kapstein in “The New Global Slave” (2006) says that since the establishment of the UN protocol in 2002 and under the U.S. law, the president has the authority to sanction states who do not put efforts in combating Human Trafficking. However, when it comes to countries that benefit the United States economically, “the Bush

administration, like its European counterparts seems to feel that a few slaves should not be allowed to get in the way of high politics” (111). Corruption does not exist only between police and traffickers, but also between state governments.

Consequently, globalization, demand, and the corruption of this business make it very lucrative. Karen G. Jayson explains that “a person trafficked into prostitution will usually earn the trafficker eight to ten times more than a non-trafficked prostitute” (13). Bishop finds out that in the United States only, human sex trafficking is a 32 million dollars in 2012 (116). Mano describes this business as a “multi-million dollar industry” because people, unlike drugs and arms, can be sold more than once (42). O’Connor and Healy assume that in Australia businessmen are involved in sex trafficking syndicates worth thirty million Australian Dollar (AUD); in fact, an Australian brothel can earn one million AUD per week (31). Kapstein writes that “the UN estimates that Human Trafficking earns around 10 billion dollar per year and that the average sale price for a slave is around 12.500 dollars” (106).

Since this business is profitable, many people are subjected to this crime. According to Siskin and Wyler, the ILO estimates in June 2012, 20.9 million individuals are likely subjected to forced labor being it labor or sex trafficking (7). This is why many organizations call for the union and complicity between countries to fight against human trafficking. In the UN report of 2018, it is estimated that more victims of human trafficking are reported to the *UN Office on Drugs and Crime* (UNODC) in 2016 than any other time over the past thirteen years (21). The same source reports more than 70% of the victims of human trafficking are women and 83% of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation (25-8).

Siskin and Wyler assume that trafficking victims are often subjected to mental and physical abuse (24). In order to control them, the traffickers are ready for everything; if it is not the confiscation of their documents, it is through traumatic experiences, threats, and death. *The UN Trafficking in Persons Report* of 2018 explains that many countries have decided to

take the necessary measures to fight. Nigeria, for example, has created the Eko State Task Force to Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2017. Nepal also decided to combine the work between The National Committee for Controlling Human Trafficking (NCCHT) and the local and district level committees to fight (4). As for Algeria, the global report show that Algeria does not really play a great role in fighting against human trafficking even though there are many investigations and prosecutions (69).

O'Connor and Healy state that "being prostituted in itself means being systematically sexually exploited and inevitably has devastating impacts on the physical and mental wellbeing of women and girls" (14). Bishop explains that prostitutes live in fear of their pimps which helps explain why these girls do not try to escape (128). And this is what we can really find in Unigwe's novel. When Sisi falls in love with her Belgian boyfriend, Luc, he asks her to quit her job telling her: " 'we could go tell the police. This man has no right to make you work for him. It is against the law even. He has broken rules. He got you a false passport' " (269). However, Sisi is afraid because "she heard Dele's 'no try cross me o. nobody dey cross Senghor Dele!' " (Ibid), so she gives up the idea of denouncing him to the police. She remembers his threat and she is afraid. This situation makes the girls prisoners who can do nothing that can contradict their trafficker's words and will because they are in constant observation as Sisi notices. When she first arrives to her first work place, a bar her Madame has chosen for her, she sees a Madam sitting alone, she wonders, "was she patrolling her girls? Making sure they behaved? Keeping an eye on her investment?" (206).

Not only this, but the girls are afraid to even give their opinions to Madam and express themselves. The narrator writes, "Here, their grief has to be contained within the four walls of their flat. No matter how much it becomes for them they must not let it swell and crack the walls" (95). They do not have any right to speak, even mourn the death of Sisi like the death of Efe's grandma. Efe decides to have a party for her grandma's death but Madam is really

upset, “Madam’s anger manifested itself in laughter that was dry . . . ‘Ah, so you’ve earned enough money now to waltz into work whenever you want?’ for a week she refused to let Efe use her booth. Instead, Efe had been forced to work in bars” (8). In fact, “Madam is not one to be contradicted” (110). As consequence of such constraints, the girls grow to hate themselves such as Joyce who scrubs herself so much until she bleeds when she is first raped in Sudan, and “she would not scrub herself like this again until she moves to Antwerp. The pain of the scrubbing was cathartic ridding her body of the weight it carried so that by the time she was done she felt reborn” (195). This shows the extent to which Joyce is uncomfortable with her situation in Belgium. Sisi also feels the same way as Joyce, “when she had never been comfortable in her job there was now a certain aversion added to the discomfort. She could no longer bear to look at herself, not even when she was alone” (247-48).

The irony in this business is that, as O’Connor and Healy state, “neither those who use prostitution, nor those who are prostituted view it as a desirable aspiration for themselves or their children” (13). The first part of this quote deals with the traffickers. In fact Dele gains money from prostitution, but he does not want his daughters to become prostitutes, he says: “‘any man wey mess with dem in future I go finish am. I go kill de man. I go squash am like ordinary mosquito, I swear!’ ” (162). Dele is a hypocrite. The second part of the quote deals with prostitutes themselves. Like what Efe decides to do, “Efe believed that within the next two years she would be free. She was already talking of maybe acquiring some girls, of becoming a madam herself” (278). Then, “it would take Efe another two years and six weeks to make her final payment. And then eighteen months to buy her first of two girls” (Ibid).

This kind of reaction, according to Bessel A. VanderKolk and Alexander C. McFarlane in their essay “The Black Hole of Trauma” (2004), is a result of trauma consisting in “re-victimizing”. They say that Freud thought that the repetition of the traumatic experience on someone else would help the traumatized person to gain mastery over their bad

memories; nevertheless, science proves the contrary. They write that “in this reenactment of the trauma, an individual may play the role of either victimizer or victim” (493). As for Joyce, her trauma starts with Polycarp who forces her to go see Dele, “ ‘I met him in his house,’ Joyce says. ‘A man called Polycarp took me there.’ Joyce winces when she says the name, as if it gives her a toothache. ‘I hated that Dele as soon as I saw him. Bastard’ ” (113). The fact that she winces means that she is in pain of what her ex-boyfriend has done to her. Sisi, for her part, hates herself and loses confidence in herself, “ ‘I do ugly things and I am not beautiful’ ” (266). This is what she tells Luc whenever he compliments her. Sometimes she even denies her life saying: “ ‘I can’t do this. . . . This is not me. I am not here I am at home, sleeping in my bed. This is not me. This is not me. This is somebody else. Another body. Not mine’ ” (212). She is forced into something that she does not want to do because she does not know about the conditions.

According to McLellan (2000), Marx makes reference to the consequence of forced labor in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* saying “so the greater this product, the less he is himself” (87).

As a result of her psychological situation and the help of her boyfriend Luc, Sisi decides to leave the house in Antwerp to go live with Luc; however, Dele gets the best of her by sending Segun to kill her, “ ‘yes. Yes, Kate. I trust you. I trust say you go take the necessary steps. Dat gal just fin’ my trouble. She cost me money. How much money you pay de police?’ ” (295). Perpetuating what sex-trafficking is all about. Knowing that Madam and Dele have the police under their control, the three other girls do not dare think about fleeing or denouncing themselves to the police. After Sisi’s death and Efe becoming a corrupt trafficker herself buying Nigerian girls from Brussels, Joyce goes back to Nigeria after four years following the death of Sisi “with enough capital to set up a school in Yaba. She would employ twenty-two teachers, mainly young women, and regularly make concessions for

bright pupils who could not afford the school fees” (279). By this act, we think that Joyce did her best to minimize victims of human trafficking by providing employment for young girls so as there is no more vulnerable preys as she also gives education opportunities for the poor. As for Ama, she opens a boutique with her Mama Eko (Ibid). So even if they have suffered a lot from their experience in Europe, Ama, Efe, and Joyce are able to construct a new life after their survival with the help of the money they get from their illegitimate work.

### **Conclusion**

Sexual markets are intimately related to shadow economy and globalization. Sex trafficking is a business that benefits the economy of countries and is beneficial for traffickers thanks to globalization as we see with Dele and Madam. The analysis of Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* confirms studies by researchers and activists; capitalism and globalization help human trafficking spread around the world. Women and young girls with complicated economic and social backgrounds are easy preys because they are ready for everything to save themselves and their families. One of the best examples for this is the situations of Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce.

## General Conclusion

“There is nothing revolutionary whatsoever about the control of women's bodies by men. The woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected.” Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*

If this research paper demonstrates one thing, it is that patriarchy's and capitalism's effects are analogous and even entwined. Both degrade and oppress women by reducing them into objects. Throughout this research paper, we have aimed at demonstrating the various social and economic constraints African women face in their societies despite the contemporariness of time. Moreover, we have attempted to prove that they are victims of economic and social oppression because of what Eisenstein calls “capitalist patriarchy”. 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.

In the first chapter of this work, we have tried to provide a background of the novel as well as the writer. We have supplied the biography of Chika Unigwe making reference to her education and professional career. Furthermore, we have provided a brief definition of this global crime as established by the United Nations Palermo protocol (2000), and reconsidered, succinctly, the theme of human trafficking in world literature in general and Nigerian literature specifically. Then, we have proceeded to explain thoroughly the theory used in the analysis, which is Marxist-feminism. We have shed light on every aspect that has helped us analyze and understand, as well as answer the questions asked.

Unigwe in her novel *On Black Sisters' Street* 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. Thus, Third World women are stuck in the class hierarchy created by Capitalism.

Marxist-feminism seems to be the most appropriate theory for our research and has proved its relevance. Feminism has helped us understand how patriarchy as a social system in Africa is unfair, oppressive, and domineering. However, Marxism has provided us with an insight about economic oppression. The proletarian cause after all is not different from women's cause.

As broad as Feminism and Marxism might be since their appearance in the western world, they aim to achieve different intentions. Feminists aim at fighting the sexist societies that indulge women in complete ignorance and passivity. Their ultimate end is to achieve equality between the two sexes. Nevertheless, they ignore other forms of oppression of women that we can find in the *On Black Sisters' Street*, mainly the economic one. For this reason, Feminism could not help us achieve our aim in this research. Neither could we rely on Marxism alone as a theory to proceed in our analysis since it is a theory that tackles the issue of class hierarchy and labor division sex blindly. It, therefore, ignores to a great extent the issue of sexual division struggles. It fails in taking into consideration the economic as well as the social oppression of women as a specific issue. As a matter of fact, Marxist-feminism is one of other movements that came to cover the majority of women's oppression facets.

Thereupon, Marxist-feminists have come to highlight the requirements of women oppressed socially and economically, as well as try to put an end to the exploitation that women endure in their societies. Maybe, in the past time this theory could not be applicable on countries from the Third World because industrialization was not global yet. However, with globalization, capitalism has become the economic system that over governs the world. It is also applicable in the case of Unigwe's novel because her protagonists are trafficked to a

Western country. Marxist-feminism attempts to reduce the devaluation of women in social as well as private sphere and liberate them from their oppressive and exploitative chains by prescribing some solutions.

Among these solutions, briefly, we can mention men and female cooperation to ameliorate the society instead of fighting each other. They also should celebrate modernity and not take it to the extreme as Unigwe's protagonists do as we see in the second chapter. By relying on this theory, we have attempted to prove that Chika Unigwe is an activist with excellence. Even if she did not suggest solutions in her novel, she successfully succeeded in introducing a new theme to the world of literature.

As our interest has gone further, we have dedicated the third chapter of this research to study the theme of human trafficking for sexual exploitation that prevails in the novel, and how it is characterized. Besides, we have provided some previous findings about the reasons and consequences of this traffic networks that match perfectly with the conditions of the four protagonists of Unigwe who have been trafficked to Belgium. Ultimately, as the research goes on, we have deduced that the sex-trafficking industry grows with the globalized economy.

Even though feminism is not enough as a theory to analyze Unigwe's novel, it can still be relied on to study the status of women in African societies and see how threat and tragedy can both separate and reunite Unigwe's protagonists in Diaspora. The novel can also be studied from a post-colonial perspective making the difference between the condition of women before and after colonialism. *On Black Sisters' Street* can also be an excellent novel about human trafficking that can be compared to other novels such as McCormick's *Sold* (2006).

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