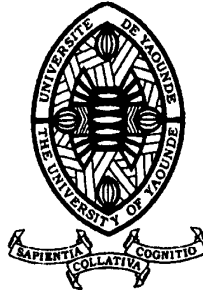


REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN

Paix – Travail – Patrie

UNIVERSITE DE YAOUNDE I
ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE
DEPARTEMENT DE ANGLAIS



REPUBLIC OF CAMEROUN

Peace – Work – Fatherland

UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE I
HIGHER TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FROM ILLUSION TO DISENCHANTMENT: A STUDY OF CHIKA UNIGWE'S ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET.

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Award of a Postgraduate Teacher's Diploma (DIPE II) in Bilingual Studies.

Par :

CLARISSE BOBYEGHA GABSA
BA
BILINGUAL LETTERS

Sous la direction
Dr DIVINE
CHE NEBA
Senior Lecturer

Année Académique
2015-2016





AVERTISSEMENT

Ce document est le fruit d'un long travail approuvé par le jury de soutenance et mis à disposition de l'ensemble de la communauté universitaire de Yaoundé I. Il est soumis à la propriété intellectuelle de l'auteur. Ceci implique une obligation de citation et de référencement lors de l'utilisation de ce document.

D'autre part, toute contrefaçon, plagiat, reproduction illicite encourt une poursuite pénale.

Contact : biblio.centrale.uyi@gmail.com

WARNING

This document is the fruit of an intense hard work defended and accepted before a jury and made available to the entire University of Yaounde I community. All intellectual property rights are reserved to the author. This implies proper citation and referencing when using this document.

On the other hand, any unlawful act, plagiarism, unauthorized duplication will lead to Penal pursuits.

Contact: biblio.centrale.uyi@gmail.com

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents Mr and Mrs Christopher Kusi Gabsa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Divine Che Neba, who has contributed enormously to the realization of this work. I also wish to thank the entire staff of the Department of English for the sound education given to me in the course of my studies in ENS Yaounde. I am deeply grateful to my parents for their encouragements during the daunting task of writing this work. I also appreciate the efforts of: Derlin Siben Nketcha and Julius Penn Mokom, and Mr Didymus Tsangue for proofreading my work, and all the assistance they have given to me in the course of writing this work.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation, entitled “From Illusion to Disenchantment: A Study of Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*,” examines how Africans generally think of the West and how such conceptions contribute to their emigration to the West in search for solutions to the various socio-economic and political problems that plague their home societies. The work attempts to show how such African women end up in prostitution and the consequences thereof. The work proceeds to examine the characters’ self realisation (of past mistakes) and assesses their efforts towards redemption. Finally, the work illustrates how issues of gender and migration can be effectively integrated into the ESL/EFL classroom in order to increase awareness and prevent students from replicating the errors exposed in the text. In view of the above, the work operates on the hypothetical contention that African’s myth of the West is a pipe dream. Thus, a trip down memory lane can help in the re-invention of the self. Using the feminist and postcolonial theoretical framework the work concludes that most of the ideas people have of the West are false, and that restoration of one’s identity is possible after its distortion by the harsh processes of migration.

Résumé

Ce travail, démontre comment les problèmes liés au genre et à la migration peuvent être intégrés effectivement dans une salle de classe où l'on étudie l'anglais comme seconde langue et comme langue étrangère afin de stimuler une prise de conscience chez les élèves et les empêcher de retomber dans les erreurs qui sont exposées dans le texte. Dans cette optique, ce travail est basé sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle le mythe africain par rapport à l'occident est une illusion. De ce fait, un voyage retour dans la mémoire peut aider dans la réinvention de soi. Faisant usage de l'approche conceptuelle théorique féministe et postcoloniale, ce travail arrive à la conclusion que la plupart des idées que les africains ont de l'occident est erronée, et que le rétablissement de l'identité de soi est possible après sa destruction par les processus difficiles de migration.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this work, entitled “From Illusion to Disenchantment: A Study of Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*,” submitted to the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaounde in partial fulfilment of the award of postgraduate Teacher diploma (DIPES II), was carried out by Clarisse Bobyegha Gabsa.

Supervisor

Divine Che Neba (PhD)

Senior Lecturer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPER ONE : MYTHS OF THE WEST	13
CHAPTER TWO : DREAMS DEFERRED	27
CHAPTER THREE : CHANGING ONE SLOUGH FOR ANOTHER: TOWARDS RESTORING THE SELF	39
CHAPTER FOUR : INTEGRATING MIGRATION LITERATURE IN AN ESL/EFL CLASSROOM	50
GENERAL CONCLUSION	66
WORKS CITED	69

INTRODUCTION

Created from the rib of man, as Judeo-Christian mythology attests, women uphold that they are equal to men. The African woman is believed to suffer double subjugation, first in the hands of the colonial masters, and then, from their male counterparts who control the society. Cherlyn Walker in *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945* affirms this view and demonstrates that, for the South African black woman, it is a triple suppression. She says:

The black woman in South Africa suffers triple suppression, of gender, race and class, have become a rhetorical common place. White women, too, it is generally recognized, are discriminated against as women, although their membership of privileged racial group soften the impact of gender discrimination and works against their identification with black women as women with shared problems. (2)

Walker in this excerpt, projects the plight of South African black women, who do not only suffer from oppression but also from racism.

African women have been placed in new roles as a consequence of civilization, technological development and societal evolution. Some have traits of their traditional nature; others are still struggling for emancipation, while others claim to be equal to men. While acting within these new roles, there are some loopholes that derail their successes.

Generally, the revalorization of the woman has been the concern of feminist critics and writers. In effect, contemporary literary critics have focused on the importance of the woman to humankind, and have denounced the injustice meted out on her. To fight against this discrimination, Chika Unigwe in *On Black Sisters' Street* has created four female characters who are determined to work hard as they leave their homeland for the riches of Europe. Though these women are undoubtedly exploited and oppressed as they sail through the journey of life, for the most part, they have made willing choices to continue with such lives in the new found land. We shall be pre-occupied in examining their drift from one slough to another as nature has offered.

To investigate this further, it is important to ask the following questions:

- What is the image constituted by Africans about the West?
- What is the impact of these constructed images on the individual and on Africans as a whole?

- Is migrating to the West, a possible solution to Africa's problems?
- How can migration literature be integrated in an EFL/ESL classroom?

These questions are answered in subsequent chapters.

The purpose of this work is: (I) to examine how Africans generally think of the West and how such conceptions contribute to their emigration to the West in search for solutions to the various socio-economic and political problems that plague their home societies; (II) to show how such African women end up in prostitution and the consequences thereof; (III) to examine the characters' self-realisation (of past mistakes) and assesses their efforts towards redemption; and (IV) to illustrate how issues of gender and migration can be effectively integrated into the ESL/EFL classroom in order to increase awareness and prevent students from replicating the errors exposed in the text. This work focuses on Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. However, references are made on other fictional and critical material related to the major issues raised in the work.

The work is significant in that, it shows a shift in women's role in literature. Chika Unigwe is a committed writer who has observed events in her society and registered these realities in her fiction. Like other African female writers such as Yvonne Vera, Bessie Head and Doris Lessing, she manipulates her female characters to expose social and cultural hurdles that hinder selfhood and the ambivalent nature of women. This means that African female writers speak for women who suffer from racial and patriarchal forces that surround them. In the same vein, this study introduces us to the theme of migration, to the West, which helps to expose some contemporary hurdles; especially among our enthusiastic youths.

The work operates on the hypothetical contention that Africans' myth of the West is a pipe dream. Thus, a ride down the memory lane can help in the re-invention of the self.

For the purpose of clarity and understanding, definition of the key terms *illusion* and *disenchantment* is necessary. Webster's *Revised Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines the term "illusion" as: "A distortion of the senses, revealing how the brain normally organizes and interprets sensory stimulation". This implies the distortion of reality that is done by most people. It may occur with any of the human senses, and it is based on the general assumptions that the brain makes during perception. The same reference adds that "illusion" is "Something that looks or seems different from what it is or something that is false or not real but that seems to be true or real". "Illusion" is also defined by *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* as: "A false idea or belief, especially about somebody or about a situation". This stresses the fact that, it is something that seems to exist but in fact it does not or seems to be something that it is not. Hence, H. M. Abrams, in *A Glossary of Literary*

Terms, quotes Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* wherein it is stated that "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusion and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile. . . . This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his life, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity" (21). We understand here that, illusion is part of the human being which if removed, man and his entire environment will become useless, consequently, man will no longer understand himself.

In this work, "illusion" is used to mean an idea that deceives by producing a misleading impression of reality which man cannot shy away from as can be seen in Chika's four female characters.

The term *disenchantment* is a state of disappointment or disillusion (thefreedictionary.com). According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, it is a feeling of disappointment about someone or something you previously respected or admired. As far as this work is concerned, disenchantment is used to refer to the utter disappointment and disillusionment that the four protagonists of *On Black Sister's Street* experience as a result of their failures to achieve their goals. In the following paragraphs, we will get to know a little bite about the author of our novel under study.

Afro-Belgian writer, Chika Unigwe, was born in 1974 in Enugu, the south eastern part of Nigeria. She was raised in Enugu in a very conservative catholic home. Every year at least once, she and her parents spent some time in Osumenyi, their ancestral home. She moved to Belgium after her undergraduate studies. As a child, she loved words and writing but it was until 2000 that she started referring to herself as a writer, after her second novel, entitled *Fata Morgana*, that she stated referring to herself as a writer. In an interview, on February 10, 2013, by Edozie Udeze, when Unigwe went to Nigeria for an award, she said writing is her career and only profession that she knows; her passion and the only thing she has always wanted to do. She explained that she wrote as a kid and was very happy to have managed to make a career out of her passion and hobby. She said her inspiration came from everywhere; if it came when she was on the road, she would jot down a few things, since she always carried a note book everywhere she went.

Unigwe, holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka that has a very vibrant creative writing department; She equally has an MA from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. She holds a PhD from the University Leiden, The Netherlands, having completed a thesis, entitled "In the Shadow of Ala. Igbo Women Writing as an Act of Righting," in 2004.

Chika Unigwe, is a multy-award winning author who writes in English and Dutch. In 2003, she won the BBC Short Story Competition for her story “Borrowed Smiles”, a Commonwealth Short Story Award for “Weathered Smiles” and a Flemish literary prize for “De Smaak van Seeuw”, her first short story written in Dutch. In 2004, she won the Cain Prize with one of her other short story entitled “The Secret”. In 2005 she won the Equiano Fiction Contest. *Night Dancer* was released on June 7, 2012 by Jonathan Cape. Her other novel one is *The Other Hundred*, was released on November 26, 2013. *Black Messiah* is her most recent novel, released in April 2014. Unigwe was selected for the Hay Festival’s Africa 39 list of 39 Sub-Saharan African writers aged under 40 with potential and talent to define future trends in African literature.

Chika Unigwe is one of the most probing, thought-provoking writers of the recent renaissance in African fiction. Many of these are female, bringing hitherto or until now, submerged stories about African women to the fore..

Chika Unigwe’s biography is very important to this study in that, it does not only give more credibility to the choice of the chosen novel, but equally highlights, her main concern in most of her works including the work under study. Being a feminist writer, she exposes the injustice of traditional male oriented African social customs that relegates women to a life of child bearing, servitude and victimization. The choice of Chika Unigwe’s novel, *On Black Sisters’ Street* for our research endeavour is largely determined by the novel’s interesting, educative and entertaining nature. This novel has won Africa’s greatest literary prize in 2012, Nigeria Prize for Literature, valued at 100,000 Dollar. It was originally written in Dutch, with the title *Fata Morgana* in 2007 and was translated into English by the author. It has also been translated into, Italian, German and Hungarian.

However, we intend to look at the novel beyond these aspects of awards, by underscoring the author’s exposure of the plight of African woman, and most especially how she does confront, criticize and to some extent, even nullify all forms of cultural and gender inequalities towards women.

Key to our work is the Feminist theory, but the postcolonial theory will be exploited in the analysis of chapter one, which is entitled “Myth of the West”. The feminist theory dates back to the 1980’s. Its main propounders and exponents include: George Sand, Germain de Stael, Emily Dickinson, Harriet Beechstone, Willa Gather and Mary Wollstonecraft. Themes explored in feminism include patriarchy, stereotyping, sexual objectification and oppression.

Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* challenges the idea that women should exist only to please men. She further proposes that women should receive the

same treatment as men in education, job opportunities and politics. With such ideas, women liberation groups rapidly spread in the United States and many European countries before reaching Africa with the advent of colonialism. Feminism or better still, feminist criticism is explained in *The Bedford Glossary Critical and Literary Terms* as, “A type of literary criticism that that became a dominant force in Western literary studies in the 1980’s” (121). Still in this reference book, Annette Kolodny in “Some Notes on Defining ‘Feminist Literary Criticism’” states that the “richness and variety of women’s writing “could be overlooked in the effort to celebrate only its ‘feminist mode’ or ‘style’ (123). Kolodny holds that women’s writing is only aimed at expressing its feminine attributes and nothing else.

M. H. Abrams’ in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines feminism as:

the basic view that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father) that is, it is male-centred and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. (25)

He goes further to say that from the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophy writing to the present, the female tends to be defined by negation in reference to the male as the human norm, hence as the other.

Feminism is a diverse collection of social theories, political movements and oral philosophies, largely motivated by experiences of women. Most feminists like Simone De Beauvoir, Kate Millet, and Mary Wollstonecraft including Chika Unigwe, are largely concerned with social, political and economical inequality between men and women. Feminist political activists commonly campaign on issues such as reproductive rights (including right to save and legal abortion, access to contraception and the availability of quality prenatal care), violence within partnership, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, street harassments, discrimination and rape.

Leitch et al in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism* states that feminist literary criticism has amongst its projects: exposing masculinist stereotypes, distortions and omissions in male dominated literature, studying female creativity, genres, styles, themes, careers and literary tradition; discovering and evaluating lost and neglected literary worlds by women . . . examining the forces that shape women’s lives, literature and criticism, ranging across psychology and politics, biography and cultural history, and creating new ideas of roles for

women. Feminism thus, is a very encompassing and comprehensive field of criticism which seeks to theorize women's experiences in their cultural and literary context.

Furthermore, John Anthony Cuddon in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories* is of the opinion that feminist criticism:

questions long-standing dominant male phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation in literature. It also attacks traditional and accepted male idea about the nature of women and about how women feel, act, think or are supposed to feel, act, and think and how in general they respond to life and living. (338)

Feminist criticism is therefore an attempt to describe and interpret women's experiences as depicted in various genres of literature. Feminist criticism is therefore partly based on skepticism expressed by feminist critics towards male biased interpretation of gender relations in literature. Cuddon equally adds that feminism examines the economic position of women as authors and the problems they face with male publishers and critics.

To Elba, a female character in *From a Crooked Rib* by Nurridin Farah, it is the society that perpetuates great discrimination between the sexes, which places women at the disadvantage. However, she also believes that, "destiny and fate can be worked out" (qtd in Helen Chukwuma 132). At another level, Chukwuma believes that "the African woman can assert herself through economic independence, hence "breaking loose the shackles" of subjugation and establishing choice as the basis of interaction" (133). To Sandra Gilbert, quoted by Rebecca West, "Feminism seeks to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that have always shadowed the connections between... genre and genre... (184).

There is a rich diversity in terms of forms of feminism based on the complex historical and regional developments. This rich diversity gives rise to a number of approaches to feminist criticism, depending on the various regions of the world. Types include liberal, Marxist, radical, anarcha, ecological, phenomenological, postmodern and social feminism. Theodore A. Ezeigbo, "Reflecting the Times: Radicalism in Recent Female-Orientated Fiction in Nigeria," asserts that another area African feminist writers focus on is the recreation of women who challenge patriarchy not just because they have been victims of such a system but because they wish to assert themselves as constituting an important and indispensable half humanity (148). Janice G. Raymond's in "Not a Choice, Not a Job Exposing the Myth about

Prostitution and Global Sex Trade,” the majority of women in prostitution, come from marginalized groups with a history of sexual abuse, drug and alcohol dependencies, poverty or financial disadvantage, lack of education and history of other vulnerabilities. These factors characterize women in both off and on-street locations. A large number of them are pimped into the sex industry at an early age. It means that, these women’s life would not change for a better if prostitution is decriminalized. Since radical feminist seek to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, rather than through a purely political process, Janice’s view supports it.

From the above, one realises that there is mutual interdependence of the feminist approach. It is important to this work because on the one hand it shows how women, especially the four girls in Chika’s *On Black Sister’s Street* are represented in life, and on the other hand, it brings out the challenges they go through in order to counter oppression.

As earlier mentioned, postcolonial theory is also used to analyze this work. Commonly accepted, in literary studies, postcolonialism has come to mean what used to be identified as Third World literature just as Chika Unigwe’s novel under study is. Here the term is used to describe the conditions of migrant groups within First World states and serves to emphasize “oppositional reading practices, exposing power relations constructing meaning in a given text” (Abrams 380). Thus, postcolonialism in its most recent definition shows a deep concern for the perspective of persons from regions and groups “outside the hegemonic power structure” (Mabiala Kenzo par 3). That is, its interest is in the oppressed minority groups whose presence is not only crucial to the self-definition of the majority group, but also critical, “placing the subaltern group in a position to subvert the authority of those who have hegemonic power (ibid). It is no wonder then that postcolonial studies have come to be identified with “subaltern studies”. This is how the theory of postcolonialism has moved beyond responding to the merely chronological construction of post -independence, and to the limited discursive experience of colonialism and imperialism. That is why G. Rai regards postcolonialism as “an enterprise which seeks emancipation from all types of subjugation defined in terms of gender, race, and class” (2). Thus, the theory does not introduce a new world which is free from the tyranny of colonialism; it rather suggests both continuity and change.

Postcolonialism is a way to look at a history from different perspectives. Postcolonial studies, the ideas of which are represented in the writings of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others provide an alternative approach to understanding the features of a new phenomenon in the present world. The theoretical

assumptions of postcolonial studies can be applied to the topic of migration because migrants are predominantly positioned at the margins of society and are subject to the hegemonial claims of the majority.

Postcolonial theory applies to this work in its role as a counter discourse to western accounts of history and its representation of Africans especially African women as backward, stupid and willing sexual objects. This is where postcolonial theory converges with feminism because postcolonial of their shared interest in the subjection or subjugation of the other. However, postcolonial theory does not fully cover the experiences of the African women, giving room for feminism in this work.

It is worthy of note that writers and critics have represented the image of the woman in different dimensions and fields. Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* has captured the attention of few scholars and critics. Her novel is a newly published text, so, not much has been written about it. However, we will look at what some individuals have written with regard to issues discussed in this her work as well as what is written about her other works like *The Phoenix* and *Night Dancer*.

Ikhide R. Ikheloa in his review article, entitled "Nigerian Prostitution" lays blame on the African government if the protagonists in the novel under study decide to go in for the kind of job they are doing. According to Ikheloa, "the novel chronicles the sad odyssey of an army of young women prostitutes drawn from various parts of Nigeria (and Sudan), who invade Europe desperate to do for themselves and their clans what waves of prostitute African governments have neglected to do for them." This contributes to what feminist stress that the society is to be blamed for the subjugation of the African woman; that "women are thus relegated to a sort of wasteland and thereby presume to contribute little or nothing of importance to the society" (par 2). This is to stipulate that the African government is supposed to empower women by granting them jobs in their homelands. One of the ladies in this novel is unable to find a job to cater for her family after graduating from the Nigerian University. In support to the above idea, Ayodele Morocco- Clark (www.independent.co.uk/art...) also says that the political shame that exists in the African terrain is no doubt what writers have always given a large part of their literary devotion to and if the Nigerian economy were good, perhaps, Sisi's dream of nailing a job would have been a reality and prophecy of goodness given to her birth a certainty (par 1). It means the politically precarious nature of many African societies is the cause of the four ladies' trip to Europe. Contributing to that, Bernadine Evaristo in his online review (theindependent.co.uk) says that "but their choices are restricted by circumstances and the Lagos they leave behind is a harsh place to survive where

on any given day one was likely to find a corpse abandoned by the roadside....” (par 2). This corroborates Morocco-Clarke’s view above that socio-political malaise is responsible for the large scale emigration of young Nigerians to the West.

Henry Ozagula in his review “*Black African Literature*” (blackafricanliterature.blogspot.com) his part, intimate that “the ladies especially Sisi, indulge in intermittent fantasies and flight of immigration to escape the grim realities of their existence” (par 1). This excerpt insinuates that the African nation is a failure and is no longer in control of the migration of Nigerian and Sudanese girls who leave their countries for greener pastures in Europe. Complementing Ozagula’s view above, Ikheloa notes that Unigwe and other Africa female black writers, like Yvonne Vera and Bessie Head, make their opinions known through the use of female protagonists. He says that “the ladies Efe, Ama, Sisi and Joyce are the main characters in a set of stories that collectively narrate epic struggle in the face of fear and despair” (par 3). The excerpt highlights the fact that female black writers make their opinions known through their female protagonists, who are able to stand up against patriarchy.

Bernadine Evaristo congratulates Unigwe on her efforts put in this novel in order for it to be successful. He says:

. . . not many novelists would wonder around the seedy red-light district of Antwerp in mini-skirt and thigh-high boots to carry out research... she also spent time persuading these women to share their stories . . . she show what the ladies become . . . Unigwe gives voice to those who are voiceless; fleshes out the stories of those who offer themselves as meat for sale, and bestows dignity on those who are stripped off it. (Par 3)

This excerpt indicates the effort and hard work Chika put into the writing of this novel and why the novel has been such a great success. In the same light of praise and congratulations, Iwunze-Ibiam (www;creativewritingnews.blogspot.com>blacksisersstreet) adds: “I was grateful for Chika Unigwe’s courage as she walked the red light districts of Brussels in her mini-skirt and high-heeled boots while she conducted her research for this solid book. Frankly, I found it difficult to put this book down” (par 4). This is to say, the domination of the black literary scene by men has slowly given way to a literature written by black women (writers) who are currently making a valuable contribution by bringing their own experiences as women to life.

Apart from the above, Ayodele Morocco-Clark points out how Africans see the West as follows: “in Nigeria especially in Ubiaju, Edo state...we call women of this ignoble foray the ‘Italos’. Whether what they do was in Belgium or Italy, the least mattered to us and the tag we gave them stayed untainted” (par 5). Thus, Europe is a land where money is made easily by African women be it in France, Italy, Belgium, Germany or any part of Europe. He adds:

what we saw of them were splotches of skin-burns that gave them the peculiarity
their sudden wealth brought . . . riches that separated them at families’ funerals
as they threw money at everything even at anybody who complimented
‘welcome Sista. Sista you just too fine’.... (Par 6)

We see here that Africans consider Europe to be a land full of money as those who go there usually come back home filled with riches that is spread carelessly. It is this same idea that pushes Chika’s four ladies to Belgium, with the belief that it is a place where all their dreams would come true.

The above scholars and others have also talked about what they like and dislike as far as *On Black Sisters’ Street* is concerned. Ikhide states that her favourite chapter is the one named “Ama”. He quips:

the chapter named Ama was the best... it hearkens to the beauty of Chinua
Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* , of what happens when language is not in the way
of the story. Here, Unigwe writes with confidence and her literary muscle
barrels her voice into a full- throated roar; the expert way she waves the local
Igbo and onomatopoeic idioms into English is sexy. (Par 3)

Chioma Iwunze-Ibiam shares the same idea when she states that “I have always admired Chika’s strong, almost intoxicating and confident voice - the voice of a prolife writer. I love the way she uses onomatopoeia” (par 4). One gets to understand in the above lines that, the use of Pidgin English by Unigwe in her work spices it and makes it look richly and purely African.

Seeing things differently, Ikhide contends that the book offers plenty to frustrate readers. He says:

The prose is uneven overall; as a result, the book sometimes has a consistency of
pulp fiction . . . the use of pidgin English added nothing to the book . . .

Unigwe's knowledge of pidgin English seemed tentative or perhaps watered down to make it more palatable to a broader market (par 5).

This reflects the unease that most natural speakers of a language usually show at the adulterated variety that those either highly educated or living abroad usually speak.

Bianca Piana in her review on *Amazon.com* equally shares her view about what she likes in the creation. He states that she finds *On Black Sisters' Street* quite an enjoyable way to understand the contradictions of the Nigerian society and incentives for illegal migration and trafficking to the West. She further explains that and the novel does a good job at acknowledging both interest that fuel trafficking, which are "the emigration aspiration of poor Nigerian women and severely limited possibilities for legal migration to the West" (par 2). This book, she avers, is therefore a solid option that gives an excellent introduction to the systems and situations which perpetuates trafficking from Nigeria to the Western world. While she sees the novel as a work that give faces to appalling development statistics and circumstances of Africa, Caryn James (www.ohioswallow.com) views *On Black Sisters' Street* as a spellbinding novel that combines a storyteller's narrative flair with a reporter's eye for grim, details about the sex industry. She concludes that Unigwe crafts her character's voices with "crystalline prose and compassion, in a revelatory work as tough, humane and unsentimental as its heroines" (par 8).

According to Uche Peter Umez in his review, "Cries from the West", the novel will remain a very telling one "so long as female trafficking and sex slavery still thrive mostly in Europe and Asia, so long as certain Westerners easily stereotype the African woman as exotica, a sex object" (par 3). To him, Unigwe is confirming what has been reported time and again that Nigeria accounts for 60% of sex workers in Europe. He adds that, looking at the novel as a literary text, "it offers a poignant narrative of the extent of exploitation some Nigerian females are willing to suffer abroad, in their struggle to make ends meet" (par 4). In other words, these lines shows Unigwe's unstinting ability to humanize, and even decriminalize, prostitutes, a social class whom society is ever ready to condemn and eradicate.

Unigwe's novel, *On Black Sisters' Street* has been compared with those of other novelists. Peter Umez compares Unigwe's first two novels with those of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helon Habila: "their thematic engagements are quite different... Adichie's first novel *In Purple Hibiscus*, stipulates that "the family unit reflects the tyranny that defines the large unit of the state, while Habila's first novel *Waiting for an Angel* situates the "debilitating effects of tyranny across various units of the society" (par 3). Adichie's second novel *Half of*

a Yellow Sun and Habila's *Measuring Time*, "employ the backdrop of war to foreground the personal and common tragedies in crisis-ridden country" (par 2). Notwithstanding, both Chika Unigwe and Adichie are genuinely concerned about the plight of womanhood, as could be seen how they deploy their narrative to resound and heighten the voice of the oppressed female in a society so patriarchal and relentless in its attempts to asphyxiate any resistant voice. *On Black Sisters' Street* is also compared to *Phoenix*, written by Unigwe and set mostly in Belgium. He says "Chika equally probes themes ranging from loneliness, displacement, loss to consumerism and racism" (par 5). These themes are postcolonial themes that resonate her novels, which are mostly seen in the novel under study, where Africa is seen as the impoverished other, and Europe is the affluent centre and as a result African girls are exploited by Europeans.

The present research differs from the above mentioned in that it does not only bring into the limelight women's predicament in Africa but show how they attempt to redefine themselves through an odd means as prostitution. The work also exposes the falsity of Africans' myths of the West and proceeds to demonstrate how one of the burning issues that the novel deals with can be introduced in the ESL/EFL classroom.

In addition to the general introduction that gives an overview of the entire work, this study consists of four chapters and a general conclusion. Chapter One, captioned "Myth of the West", examines Africa's conceptions of the West. Chapter Two, entitled "Dreams Deferred", exposes the social, cultural and economic reasons that push African women into prostitution and the consequences of their choice of job. Chapter Three, labelled "Changing One's Slough for Another: Toward Restoring the Self," examines how the female characters in the novel, transcend their negativity and redefine themselves. Chapter Four, "Integrating Migration Literature in an English Language Lesson," investigates how excerpts of the novel could be used in teaching vocabulary. By integrating aspects of Literature in an English Language lesson, students will be acquainted with notions of feminism. The general conclusion summarizes the major arguments which have been evoked, brings out findings, recommendations and suggests possible areas for future research.

CHAPER ONE

MYTHS OF THE WEST

This chapter discusses in some detail some of the false notions that cause the characters in the novel to migrate to the West. The chapter also proceeds to show the origin and basis of such myths and how the characters' ignorance and circumstances lure them into believing these myths. In this chapter, after discussing the various myths, we wish to argue that the characters once caught up in the vicious cycle, inadvertently confirm stereotypes thereby propagating the existing myths. The chapter finally emphasises that these female characters are victims of two forces: subjection and subjectivity - since they are subjected to the harsh socio-economic climate at both at home and abroad, on the one hand, and on the other, they are motivated by subjective views about home and the West.

On Black Sisters' Street follows four female characters - Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce. The first three women all leave Nigeria on their own accord to work in Antwerp as prostitutes, with the hope of improving their lives. The protagonists' stories diverge beyond these broad common features: Sisi, whose real name is Chisom, is a university graduate who is jobless after graduation; Efe has to support a son whose father, a married man, refuses to acknowledge; and Ama, who is perpetually being abused by her devoutly Christian stepfather in Enugu, finds no satisfaction in her "predictable and circular" job (159) at her relative's small restaurant. Of the four main characters, only one, Joyce, is tricked into the journey to Belgium, under false pretences. The young woman, whose real name is Alek, is originally from the Sudan, where her family was massacred by a janjaweed militia. Following the tragedy - during which, she was also raped - she spent several months in a refugee camp, where she fell in love with a Nigerian soldier, Polycarp. The couple soon settled in Lagos but the man, pressured by his family into marrying a girl from his own Igbo ethnic group, arranged for Alek to be sent to Belgium - allegedly to work as a nanny. These three conscious protagonists believe that Europe is the answer to all their problems. Europe for them becomes a panacea to all their problems.

The first myth that is evident here is that of Europe as the beginning and end civilization. Progressively, the world is built by the contribution of all its inhabitants yet

Europe from time immemorial has appropriated the story of civilization. What attracts our attention is why all civilization is attributed to the West. Europeans tell their story and then believe that it is the story of the whole world. Such stories have influenced the rest of the world until many believe that humankind's paradise is the West.

This polarized and essential construct has become fully apparent within the European imagination. The years between 1700 and 1850, European imagination forced the world into two radical camps called the West and the East or better still, the West and the Rest. Due to this conception, the West was imagined to be superior to the East. The imagined values of the inferior East were set up as antithesis of rational Western values. The West specifically was imagined as being inherently blessed with unique virtues; it was rational, hard-working, productive, sacrificial and parsimonious, liberal-democratic, honest, paternal and mature, advanced, ingenious, proactive, independent, progressive and dynamic. This is obviously why: "Efe before coming to Belgium, imagined CASTLES AND CLEAN streets and snows as white as salt" (23). In other words, the rest of the world and Africans in particular believe that Europe is more matured as compared to the rest of the world. The East is then cast as the West's opposite, Other, as irrational and arbitrary, lazy, unproductive, indulgent, exotic as well as alluring and promiscuous, despotic, corrupt, childlike and immature, backward, derivative, passive, dependent, stagnant and unchanging. Another way of saying this is that European countries are defined by a series of progressive presence while African countries are defined by a series of absences. Thus, the West has always been and will always be superior to the rest of the world since it allegedly enjoys dynamic progressive, liberal and democratic values and rational institutions from the outset, which in turn give birth to the rational individual, whose life is seen as a solution to the economic progress and the inevitably breakthrough to the blinding light and warmth that Unigwe's four protagonists rush for. This is why people in other parts of the world, especially Africa think of an opportunity to travel to the West as a huge blessing from God. In the novel, the narrator recounts that:

Dele shouted . . . Oya! Make am beautiful. She dey go abroad. Today! Beautify am (29). That night, her mother thanked God in a voice that brought in the neighbors from both side. And the white-wearing churchgoing young couple did a dance around the room, clapping and calling on God by twenty-nine different names to let the blessings that had fallen on Chisom fall on them, too. When the woman said 'fallen,' she made Chisom think of blessings as something heavy that could crush you" (41) Chisom's father nodded. 'This is it! How many

people get opportunities like this? This is it! Yes. Yes. Indeed, this is it!' Her mother nodding vigorously. Yes! Yes! Very true. Very true'. (42)

The imagery of blessing that falls on the characters, according to the above quotation highlights their belief that the West is a place where all needs can be met - that the West is a generous society and civilized, independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Dele as well as Chisom's neighbours and parents strongly believe that Europe or the West is a very special place. The individual as well as the community at large believe in the above myth constructed by the Europeans. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has an autonomous genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry crossed with democracy, in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as stated by Uneigwe:

'Belgium. A country wey dey Europe. Next door to London.' ...he made it sound as if you could walk from Belgium to London. From one door to the next '....if I want go abroad, Oga Dele? Anybody dey ask pikin if de pikin want sweet....' ...Who did not want to go abroad? People were born with the ambition, and people died trying to fulfil that ambition.... (70)

This shows the mentality that Europe is a dream land, where everybody should go, is deeply engrafted in the collective psyche of all Nigerians in particular and Africans in general. Many Africans naturally assume that the East and West are, and always have been, separate and different entities. Almost all over the postcolonial world, it is generally believed that it is the 'autonomous' or 'pristine' West that has alone pioneered the creation of the modern world; at least, that is what many are taught at school. Thus, the traditional view that Europeans spread outwards conquering the East and Far West while simultaneously laying down the tracks of civilisation along which the whole world could be delivered from the jaws of deprivation and misery into the bright light of modernity. In this wise, Divine Che Neba argues in "Recycling Myth and Revisionism in the Post-Colonial Discourse" that

It is worth mentioning that Europe and America that are now flaunting their development and progress also lived through a period of snail-paced revolution, but that did not stop them from making history at the time nor did that imply that

they were devoid of talented people. The history they made was a history of a particular people, at a given time and, with its peculiarities. Of course, it took centuries for them to be what they are today, so the world cannot expect Africa to create a miracle in less than a century, after their contributions to history and civilization have been carefully effaced by the imperial powers. It is important to note that Africans are not obliged to see their future through the Western lens.

(Par 4)

This implies that the West is the cradle of civilisation as they have made the rest of the world believe. Civilisation was a process that was achieved by particular people at a particular time and the West is the first part of the world to experience civilisation. Accordingly, it seems entirely natural and self-evident for many to conflate the progressive story of world history with the Rise and Triumph of the West. This traditional view can be called ‘Eurocentric’. For at its heart is the notion that the West properly deserves to occupy the centre stage of progressive world history, both past and present.

In this light, Efe sees going abroad as a very beautiful place where all her dreams especially that of proving her son Lucky Ikponwosa or providing L. I. with a good education and life:

‘... I am going abroad...’ The word ‘abroad’ brought a smile that stretched her lips from one end to the other and a sweet taste to her tongue, a taste not unlike that of very ripe plantain ‘I am going to Europe. Belgium’ Before Rita had a chance to ask her how and where, Efe preempted her and said ‘close to London’. She repeated Dele’s phrase, seeing in her mind’s eye two big doors one beside the other, with BELGIUM marked on one hand and LONDON marked on the other side. Belgium’s proximity to London suggested that it was like London. They had sung London in rhymes while playing in dust-covered front yards, clapping to its tune.

London Bridge is falling down

Falling down falling down

London Bridge is falling down

My fair laaaaaaadddyyyyyyy

Pussycat, Pussycat

Where have you been?

I have been to London to see the queen. (71-2)

Thus the rest of the world basically appears as an aside or an irrelevant footnote, since it has been believed for long that the history of Europe covers the essential history of civilization, with unimportant exceptions; that the progress of the white or Europeans has long been the natural, normal path to the highest possible human culture.

In recent years, a small band of scholars, especially of Marxism/world systems theory, liberalism and Weberianism such as Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein, have claimed that their standard theories rise from the West. They all assume that the 'pristine' West 'made it' of its own accord as a result of its innate and superior virtues or properties. This view presumes that Europe autonomously developed through iron logic of immanence. Accordingly, such theories assume that the rise of the modern world can be told as the story of the rise and triumph of the West. Importantly, the Eurocentric account has enjoyed a new lease of life or fresh reinvigoration, particularly with the 1998 publication of David Landes's *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, a book that implicitly harks back to John Roberts's *The Triumph of the West*. Landes's book in particular launches a passionate and pejorative attack against some of the recent anti-Eurocentric analyses.

Perhaps, Unigwe, through her four protagonists Efe, Sisi, Joyce and Ama, is drawing attention to the fact that, Europeans or the West bourgeoisies have succeeded in bringing the whole world, even the most barbarian nations into civilization. The West compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the Western bourgeoisie mode of life and production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst in order to become Western themselves. In the novel, Efe states that "he says a woman can earn easy money there . . . before one year even, I'll be rich. I'll buy a Mercedes-Benz!" (72). This shows that they West is the centre of wealth and technological advances. In other words, the West creates a world after its own image just as the for ladies in the novel do; they see the Belgium (West) as a land of milk and honey, where money is gotten easily and within a very short period of time.

Nonetheless, Karl Marx in his *German Ideology* traces the origins of capitalist modernity back to Ancient Greece - the fount of civilization. To him, the Western man was originally born free under 'primitive communalism' and, having passed through four

progressive historical epochs, would eventually emancipate himself as well as the Asian through revolutionary class struggle. Moreover, European history was inscribed with a progressive temporal linearity, while the East was imagined to be governed by regressive cycles of stagnation. In particular, within the Eurocentric discourse this divide implied a kind of ‘intellectual apartheid regime’ because the superior West was permanently and retrospectively quarantined off from the inferior East. Or, in Rudyard Kipling’s infelicitous poetic line, entitled “The Ballad of East and West” where he writes:

OH, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho’ they come from the ends of the earth! (L 1-4)

Kipling shows very clearly that he does not believe there will ever be equality between the races here on earth except perhaps in heaven. This mode of thinking and of the seeing the world was crucial precisely because it immunised the West from recognising the positive influence imparted by the East over many centuries, thereby implying that the West had pioneered its own development in the complete absence of Eastern help ever since the time of Ancient Greece. And from there it was but a short step to proclaiming that the history of the world can only be told as the story of the pioneering and triumphant West from the outset, thus, the myth of the pristine West.

For Marx, the Western proletariat is humanity’s “Chosen People” no less than the Western bourgeoisie is global capitalism’s “chosen people”. Marx’s inverted Hegelian approach gave rise to a progressive or linear story in which Chisom, Ama, Efe and Joyce find it very special to be part of. According to the characters in the text under study, Lagos was not a place to rely on completely as the following song justifies:

Lagos na no man’s land,
Lagos na waya.
For Lagos, man pikin no get sister or brother.
For Lagos, na orphan Ibe.
Lagos na waya aaa. (117)

This is to say, when one is in Lagos, he or she is nothing. The four lady protagonists therefore are determined to travel out of the Lagos in order to escape the utter penury and misery that is associated with it, even if it means entering into a life of prostitution in the West. Their desire is to be engrafted into the stem of the “Chosen People” that Karl Marx talks of.

The desire to show off wealth in Africa, which is as a result of the communal lifestyle of African societies also helps to intensify the myth of the West as a place where easy gold can be gathered on the streets. Most often, people who travel abroad hope to one day return home and confirm their differential status thereby boosting their family name. This explains why in the novel Ama asks: “...how can we come to Europe and go back empty-handed? God forbid bad thing...” (151). This rhetorical question shows that it will be a disgrace and a disappointment for them to return home empty-handed. As a result, they prefer to work as prostitutes. To them, happiness can only be acquired through material wealth, and this wealth can only be gotten from the West even if it is through the sex industry. Africa is then seen as backward and unchanging, confirming one of the myths constructed by the West; they imagine, create and Africans simply practice and consume without questioning. This explains why Ama cares less about the kind of job she is going to do in order to make the kind of money she dreams of. She says that everybody wants to leave the country and that she “knew people who would give their right arm for an opportunity to work abroad. People with university degrees...” (140).

Socially, another myth is that Western doctors are more competent and as such, people always travel out of their countries for better health treatment. One of the myths of the West is that the West is advanced and more developed scientifically. This shows that their drugs likewise health services are the best. Most Africans nowadays leave their countries for illnesses they believe can only be treated in Europe. Thus, the West is scientific while the East is superstitious.

Also, due to this European civilization, Africans tend to adopt the Western style of learning. The African educational system is seen as less developed than that of Europe, as such, most Africans go to Europe after their secondary school studies for specialized university studies so that after such valuable and qualified education, they will be able to get good jobs with heavy monthly wages. This has caused many Westerners to devalue the degrees obtained from their other parts of the world, thereby obliging Africans with degrees to do unskilled jobs. A good example in the text is Sisi. She is a university graduate. The narrator states:

...the second picture, the one in the middle, was of Chisom in a graduation gown that touched the ground, flanked by her parents. Her father's head was slightly bent, but a smile was visible. Her mother's smile was more obvious, A show of the teeth. Chisom was the widest. In her new shoes bought specially for the occasion, she knew that her life was starting to change 'I am just glad I have graduated,' she was looking forward to a realization of everything dreamed.... (16-17)

We therefore expect her to travel to Europe and work in an area related to her university degree; rather, she ends up as a prostitute on the streets of Europe.

Moreover, the only kind of certificate or diploma which is regarded in the West is nursing. This is partly due to the fact that the role of a nurse in the West is that of a care-giver. A nurse is simple one who takes care of patients in the hospital – taking their temperature, helping them take their drugs, reporting any problems to the doctor and so on. Westerners have no fear employing people from the less-developed world into this domain. The narrator states that

... had she had foresight, she often thought, she would have done a nursing degree. at Christmas most of the men returning home from Europe and America with wallets full of foreign currency. To scut for wives, always went for the nurse. They say it was easier for nurses to get a job abroad. "The British NHS depends on you fucking nurses, innit?" Ed, her friends and Ezimma's cusin, told her. Ed also had come to get a wife. He lives in England- somewhere unpronounceable that ended in "shire"-but so unmistakably English that it made him attractive and within. Three weeks of being in Nigeria parading both himself and his pounds, he found himself a willing nurse. (28)

The above excerpt confirms the fact that nursing is quite lucrative in the West, probably because it is the kind of job that most Westerners would not like to do.

Another myth that is common mostly in Western countries (partly perpetuated by bad African leaders who are unwilling to hand over power when their terms are over) is that African countries are war-torn or unstable due to bad leadership. People in the West therefore believe that African jungles are covered with rotting corpses and everywhere there are refugees. The resultant effect is that some kind Europeans are somewhat ready to allow

Africans to live on the sidelines of their societies rather than return and be killed or starve to death in their home countries. This myth is also enforced by NGO's, who instantly project images of suffering Africans in refugee camps. People in the West see Africa not as a continent with fifty-four nations which are mostly peaceful, but as one large country troubled by poverty, disease and war. As a result, Africans, who want to travel abroad at all costs or who want to traffic other Africans use this myth to their advantage. The following incident narrated in the novel proves the point:

...another man with black hair took her into another office and listened as she poured out her Liberian story. She made sure she did not forget any detail. Yes. She was sure her name was Mary Featherwill. Yes. She was Mandingo. Yes. Her family had been killed and there was a price on her head. Could she have a tissue, please? She was sorry for crying. Yes. Her life was in danger. No. She did not think she would survive a day in Liberia. No. She had no other family alive. No. She knew no one in Belgium...Once their eyes met, and she saw something in his eyes that convinced her he knew she was lying. Yet she did not stop. She stuck to her story. Yes. Yes. She was born in Monrovia. No. She did not have a passport because she had left the house in a hurry and was really scared for her life. No. She did not have any form of identification. No. no drivers license; she did not know to drive. No. She did not have any birth certificate. She had taken nothing from her house. She was running for her life. No. No family pictures. She had not thought of taking anything from the house but herself. Her security was the only thing that she had thought about

(149-50)

The above quote shows that even though the story is not coherent and the white man can clearly see signs of insincerity in Sisi's eyes, he is still influenced by the myth of Africa as a war-torn place, as a result, he must consider her situation. Sisi changes her name from the Sisi into Mary Featherwill Madingo - from a Nigerian into a Liberian citizen. She equally constructs a new parent and identity for herself. This myth of wars and massacres all over the country is therefore used by some Africans to get their way into Europe, which they consider to be more secured, developed and rich.

Another myth that makes African especially Nigerians to leave their homelands is the fact that, the government is poor and cannot provide jobs for its citizens. In Nigeria, for example, the government has made the people to understand that the population of Nigeria is too large for the government to be able to provide employment for the majority of the citizens. This goes in line with Western myth of dependency. According to dependency theorists Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in “Development under Fire,” there are limitations upon self-sustained growth in the periphery and “they require modifications in the role of the state to guarantee the functioning of the economy and the political articulation of a society, which contains, within itself, foci of inarticulateness and structural imbalance” (par 12). Such myths cause African governments to be content with poverty, corruption and ineffective administration, after all, they believe that people do not expect much from them. In the novel, this is evident from the following discussion between Alek and Polycarp:

...Too many people. Too many houses. An excess of everything. Nothing was organized. It reminded her of a drawing by an enthusiastic child with very little talent. Houses jungled for space, standing on one another's toes, so close that Alek feared you could hear your next-door neighbor breathing...She went to Isale Eko in her first week and saw houses standing lopsided next to one another like wobbly tables knocked together by an amateur carpenter, and naked children running around with knobby belly buttons. Polycarp had told her then that some of the houses had no bathrooms: ‘and this is Lagos in the twenty-first century! Lagos in 2004 . . . all our government is good for is stuffing their pockets. They don't care what happens to the people they are supposed to be ruling’... Lagos streets were rutted, gutted, and near-impassable, yet they were jam-packed with cars: huge air-conditioned jeeps driving tail to tail with disintegrating jalopies whose faulty exhaust pipes sent out clouds of dark smoke, making the air so thick with pollution that a constant mist hung over the city, and bit of sky that one was sullied with dirt. Broken-down trucks dotted the highways . . . The trucks that did move ferried cows and goats, packed tight like sardines. (183-4)

This excerpt is a vivid description of a typical African state that is riddled with bad leadership and mismanagement. The narrator also says that Lagos is overcrowded: “there were many flyover loops to ease the traffic of the more than ten million people who called Lagos home

(184), with so many jobless people. The government rulers are only interested in getting richer while the poor get even much poorer. Thus it is desperation that causes many Africans to believe in the myths that present Europe as a utopia.

Besides, the land is insecure due to the high level of joblessness. Jobless people all over the world tend to resort to crime and other unorthodox activities in order to make ends meet. In the Nigerian society, crime and magic or occultism are very common means of making quick money. The narrator states that

...on a given day, one is likely to find a corpse abandoned by the roadside, waiting for someone to claim it or for the many vultures that circled the city to devour it. Some of the dead were victims of hit-and-run drivers, most of whom were found and brought to justice. The majority dead, however, Polycarp told her, were homeless people murdered by those who needed them to make money. Apparently, juju made of human blood was the best sort to ensure abundant wealth. (184)

The imagery of vultures hovering over corpses in the quote above indicates the total chaos and inhumanity into which society has descended.

So far, we have discussed some of the myths that circulate around African societies and the West in a bid to explain the mass exodus of Africans to the West, and the subsequent outcomes of such movements. We are going to proceed to discuss how the subjects contribute to the construction and circulation of these myths.

The African characters in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* tend to indulge in the exaltation of western myths, reducing themselves to nothing, as the Western myths stipulates. The fact that the West sees itself as superior shows that Africans are subjects. Subjectivity is typically associated with the white European looking down on Africa. At the same time, the Nigerian women in the story are all victims of sexual exploitation in their host country, which causes them to easily settle for a life of prostitution in the West. They do not get into it because it is in their nature to do so but because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. This testifies the complex interplay between their sense of agency and the objectification to which they fall prey. The ambiguous relationship between subjectivity and subjection is also eloquently demonstrated by the fact that, while most of the protagonists have come to Antwerp deliberately, their choice was often forced on them by the lack of viable options in their society of origin.

At the meta-fictional level, the restoration of Sisi's dignity is eventually achieved through the recounting of the story of her life – and not as the character herself had anticipated, through her acquisition of material wealth. While exposing the systematic equation between money and happiness as illusory, the novel does not indulge in any form of preaching against its characters, and neither does it indicate that the contemporary world is all doom and gloom. For instance, the relatively pessimistic outlook suggested by Sisi's death and Efe's eventual career choice is counter balanced by the story of Ama, who ends up opening a boutique in Nigeria, and even more so, by that of Alek, who uses the money she has earned in Antwerp to set up a school in Yaba. This suggests that, despite Sisi's unfortunate experience, the author is still hopeful about the role that education may play in the future of Nigerian society.

Just as the presence of four main characters prevents any social typecasting of prostitutes, so the novel's utilisation of culturally-related elements exposes the illegitimacy of all forms of pigeonholing based on racial or ethnic criteria. Remarkably, the deconstruction of such widely held prejudices is achieved precisely through the use of cultural stereotypes. Already in her first novel, *The Phoenix*, Unigwe showed how some Europeans held unfounded or largely exaggerated beliefs about Africa; importantly, however, some of her African characters made similar generalizations about Europe - which demonstrated that Africans and Europeans both displayed the same human weakness, namely that of having preconceptions about the "Other". *On Black Sisters' Street* adopts a somewhat similar approach towards clichés, but it takes the strategy one step further.

The later novel contains, for instance, white characters who ask Sisi if she is fluent in Lingala; a language widely spoken in Central, but not Western, Africa - and includes a passage where Sisi swears never to eat anything she cannot easily identify, after finding out that her Belgian boyfriend eats horse meat. Such uninformed assumptions or extreme reactions undeniably imply that ignorance and bias exist on both sides of the so-called cultural divide. Yet, in *On Black Sisters' Street*, the gap between civilisations does not only separate one continent from the other - as is often the case in fiction by African immigrants in Europe - but it is also defined along intra-continental lines. In an apparently anecdotal, yet meaningful, passage, two of the Nigerian women, Ama and Sisi, are attending a party in Antwerp and feel superior to the Ghanaians present:

Ama spied two Ghanaian guests going back for a third helping of rice and smirked to Sisi that surely, surely, Nigerians cooked better, made tastier friedrice than Ghanaians. (People who threw whole tomatoes in sauces could not

really cook, could they?) And both women agreed that Ghanaians were just wannabe Nigerians (11)

This extract serves at least two major purposes. Firstly, it demonstrates at an early stage in the novel that African communities - even in the diaspora - are not unified wholes. The above passage achieves this in a playful manner, but other sections of the narrative make analogous statements regarding more tragic situations. A case in point is the feeling of isolation experienced by Alek in the refugee camp: the young woman finds herself unable to make friends “couldn’t make friends with the other refugees” (167), even though they are victims of the same war. Despite the passages’ radical different tones, both events illustrate that the shared plight of individuals does not necessarily inspire an unconditional community spirit. Secondly, Ama and Sisi’s mocking remarks about the Ghanaians also introduce the reader to the characters’ assertiveness and judgemental behaviour. Less obviously perhaps, their dismissive description of Ghanaian cooking and their smugness towards the guests also seem to be reminiscent of the European “colonial gaze.” Indeed, the two Nigerian protagonists indulge in the perpetuation of stereotypes about the “Other” and conclude to the latter’s inferiority —a behaviour that indicates that Africans too can be biased. This idea finds echoes in another passage:

At the door, a tall dark man stood guard. He wore a plain black cap and stonewashed jeans. Sisi wondered where he was from. His darkness did not look Nigerian . . . Senegalese, perhaps. Or Gambian. He might even be from one of those Rwanda and Burundi places. She could not decide. (175)

This excerpt subtly reinforces the abovementioned point about some Nigerians’ attitudes towards other African citizens. Sisi’s reference to “one of those Rwanda and Burundi places” is tinted with a sense of mild condescension (reinforced by her use of the demonstrative “those”) that one might more readily associate with colonialist views of the continent.

Significantly, the amalgamation of Rwanda and Burundi resurfaces later in the novel, in a passage describing benevolent white women who talk to Sisi at the bus stop:

Old women would tell [her] of when they lived in the Congo many decades ago, talk fondly of Albertville which had now been renamed something they could never remember, something African. Ask you if you

spoke Lingala. What you thought of Kabila. Talk of their niece who could not have a baby and adopted a beautiful little son from Rwanda. Or Burundi: 'Beautiful baby, only problem is his hair. Quite difficult to comb, the krulletjes. I told them to try the clothes softener I use. Smells nice and the best softener I've ever used. If it works on clothes no reason it should not work on hair. Don't you think?' (241)

The interchangeability of Rwanda and Burundi in this passage may evoke different versions of a typical scenario at the bus stop, but it may also, in keeping with the white women's ignorance about Africa, reflect their confusion of the countries. In any case, their questioning of Sisi on Congolese matters, combined with the Nigerian character's own lumping together of Rwanda and Burundi, suggests that both the European and African characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* unwittingly amalgamate "foreign" African cultures in a manner strongly reminiscent of reductive colonial attitudes. But the longer quotation above is also significant in another respect. Reading the monologue in direct speech (apparently a specific example of the comments routinely made by old Belgian women), one can hardly resist smiling at the suggestion of using "clothes softener" to untangle the frizzy hair of a child. Yet, the idea of using a product usually applied to objects on a human being may conceal more serious undertones, considering the novel's focus on the sexual exploitation - and thus objectification - of African women in Belgium. The prostitutes' loss of dignity indeed seems to be linked to the removal of their agency and even to the repression of their humanity by external forces. The most obvious point of departure to demonstrate the mechanics of this process is the story of Alek also called Joyce, the only character who did not enter prostitution voluntarily.

In a nutshell, we can say that these myths that the Europeans have brought into limelight cause a struggle between the two coherent ideologies (West and East), which is indeed problematic. This is because they instil in the Africans a subjectivity that inevitably leads to subjection as is evident from the plight of our female protagonists. The subjectivity, as discussed above, is partly caused by Africa's omission from history, on the one hand and her passivity on the other hand. We also apportion part of the blame to the economic and socio-political flaws of the protagonists' societies as well as character flaws. The next chapter is going to delve deeper into the subjection of the four characters from the point of view gender since all of them are female. In other words, it will show how their gender identity helps to defer their dreams.

CHAPTER TWO

DREAMS DEFERRED

The chapter examines the myriad evidences in *On Black Sisters' Street* that expose the falsity at the core of Western myths. It explores how the four ladies' dreams are shattered and their realization that their ambitions to travel abroad for a better life had been serious mistakes. This chapter argues that the novel firmly situates the life narratives of four African women within today's geopolitical power relations and that their narratives include tragic episodes of poverty, war experience, sexual abuse and families torn apart in their home countries, which makes them vulnerable to the call to enter the global woman's traffic network run by Oka Dele. On arrival in Belgium, however, they soon realize that they have travelled across the seas for a mirage of a more prosperous life in Europe, as they see their dreams shattered.

In an interview, Chika Unigwe says that her urge to write about the lives of African sex workers in Antwerp arose from two different experiences. Her initial interest in the topic was sparked by the "culture shock" she felt in Belgium when she saw young women on display in windows – a highly unfamiliar sight in Nigeria (qtd in Tunca 5). Then, she was struck by the words of Caryl Phillips, who, at the end of his essay on the Nigerian women working in Antwerp's red-light district, concluded: "this is not my story to tell. Others in Belgium will have to tell it" (ibid). So she decided to put on a miniskirt and descend on the streets of Antwerp to tell their stories.

These four ladies are mostly university graduates, who have either failed to find a job in their home countries or are travelling abroad where they believe they will find well-paid jobs. Unfortunately for them, when they arrive Europe they realize that it does not offer illegal African immigrants good jobs and that the only jobs available to them in this patriarchal society, where women are objectified is prostitution. Through flash-back, Efe, Ama and Alek/Joyce take turns in telling the others how they became prostitutes. Ruth Price explicates that while researching for her novel Unigwe found out that :

many of Belgium's African prostitutes are university graduates – Sisi's frustration at finding a decent job after graduation is what eventually leads her to sell her body in Europe. While the women in this novel are undoubtedly exploited, for the most part, they have made a willing choice to continue with this life, as a means to a better future. Efe is a single mother, and her earnings

support her child back home; Ama was abused as a child and will do what she must to gain financial independence; Joyce dreams of setting up a school back home in Nigeria.

Sisi's death reminds us of the risks they take in their twilight world with its pimps, madams and bribery, yet this is not a novel without hope. Instead, the reader is left with the impression of capable, intelligent, ambitious women. Their humanity shines through as they tap their windows, squashed into tacky outfits, vying for custom that will give them their chance for a better life. (Par 3-4)

The above quote shows that when these women get to Europe and realize that it is only through prostitution that they can earn a living, instead of throwing the towel and returning home, they rather adapt to the new situation, and indeed are able to make some money.

Also, even when Sisi is being offered the job of a prostitute by Dele, she is clearly appalled at the prospects. She feels angry and feels as to say:

Do you know I have a university degree? Do you know I am a graduate?' She expected that her anger would give her the courage to slap his fat face. She expected to want to smash his mobile phones through his double-glazed windows. She waited for the hurricane of anger that would drive her to start breaking things and shout, 'Stupid, useless man. Oloshi! Old man wey no get shame.'(39).

However, she suppresses her anger and rather decide to accept the offer and travel abroad in full realisation that her dreams are being deferred.

Moreover, Dele is the man who introduces them into prostitution through flattery. Their dreams are deferred by transferring their imagination of the West, thereby forgetting about their level of education and the different job opportunities they would have found if they remained in their own country. Sisi is an ambitious university student unable to find suitable job. Her illusion and disenchantment begins in Nigeria. She works very hard to get a degree from the university hoping that, upon graduation, she will earn a job; this job will permit her to give her family the comfort her father failed to give them:

Study! Rea! You will have all the time on earth to rest once you graduate! She had studied hard, not because of her father. Or even because of the vision the soothsayer had seen. But for herself, a university education guaranteed a good

job. She burned candles when there was a power failure and studied in their light, straining her eyes. What had all that been for? What had all that hard work and straining and worrying about exam results gotten for her. (211)

The above flashback from Sisi's shows how her dreams suddenly vanish in thin air because in Europe she has realized the uselessness of all her years of hard work at the university in Nigeria. She cannot even return to her own country where her university has value because there she is supposed to have "connections" before earning a job. She tells us that while in Nigeria she had written multiple job applications to no avail. She even quotes excerpts of some of the futile applications:

Dear Mr. Uloko

With reference to the advertisement placed in the Daily Times

Of June 12, I am writing to---

Dear Alhaji Musa Gani:

With reference to the advertisement placed in The Guardian of

July 28, I am writing to apply--- (20)

She states that she was never invited for even one of the above job applications. There was no place for her, no reply came addressed to her. Including other applications directed to the different banks of her country in which her classmates, whom she considered less intelligent, with better connections occupied. In this light, blame is laid on her government and home nation for failing to provide jobs to the poor citizenry who do not know anybody in high positions. Nepotism and favouritism are therefore responsible for the difficult economic hardships that most Nigerians face. Also, we could suggest the existence of gender bias in this novel. The fact the author presents only the difficulty of women in finding a job could be as a result of their femininity.

Subsequently, Dele becomes the key to the fulfilment of Sisi's dreams of making good money after her university graduation, in order to provide for her family and herself a big luxurious mansion and a car, open a boutique and get into partnership with Joyce. Through Sisi's stream of consciousness, the narrator presents Sisi's contemplation of her future life as follows:

Who had the key but Dele? Dele the big man with an office on Randle Avenue.

Dele had brought her to the brightness that was in her future. When he made the

offer, she had found herself grasping it, the prophecy assuming truth, her belief in it as unequivocal as her father's had been. If Dele could get her a passage to Europe, he would bring the soothsayer's prediction to fulfillment. (211)

Dele here represents the "connections" Sisi and her family needed. In most African countries we can only get jobs if and only if we have connections; caring less about the fulfilment of the requirements, whether all the documents and qualifications needed are valid. Another form of this "connection" is money. With money, one can buy everything, even titles are sold in Nigeria. Buying a chieftaincy title is one of Sisi's dream that was never realized.

While in Belgium, a movement from Sisi's illusion to her disenchantment is a fact. That is why she ends up as a prostitute. Sisi needs money because she must pay back in heavy monthly instalments the fee of 500 Euros to Dele, money spent for her trip to Belgium. Smith Claiborne, in his review of the novel, states:

. . . the young immigrant roommates' . . . personal motivations differ, they are united by their obligation to Dele, a portly, powerful Nigerian 'businessman.' Based in Lagos, he offers them passports and travel expenses with the stipulation that they send him a hefty cut of their earnings each month to pay off their considerable debt. Once in Antwerp they are placed under the care of 'Madam,' a hard-nosed African woman with questionable loyalties. Sisi, the most educated of the group, leaves behind a good man, Peter, whose modest ambitions don't mesh with her big dreams. Efe sacrifices her own happiness to support her young son L.I., who lives back home with her younger sister, while moody Ama flees an abusive stepfather. The youngest, Joyce, was born Alek in Southern Sudan. A survivor of wartime atrocities, including rape, she follows Polycarp, a kindly seeming Nigerian soldier, back to Lagos. But their romance sours when Polycarp's mother forbids him from marrying the refugee. He then goes to Dele and pays Joyce's way to Belgium, where she, unlike the other women, initially believes she will be working as a nanny. (Par 1)

The above quote shows how the dreams of these women are doomed to be shattered right from the beginning because they are trapped in circumstances they cannot fully manage. With a fake passports withheld by Madam and living under her close surveillance, Sisi is almost not only literally imprisoned in the house in the red-light district but objectified in the

position of a black sex worker, satisfying white men's sexual desires. According to Oga Senghor Dele, Sisi will make a lot of money in a short while because she is very beautiful:

I get connection. Dat one no be your worry. As long as you dey ready to work, you go make am. You work hard and five hundred Euros every month no go hard for you to pay...You be fine gal now. Abi, see your backside, kai! Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest nyansh? Make them come here, come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for chest, omo, how you no go find work ? He fixed his eyes, beady and moist and greedy, on her breast. When his words sank in, she expected to be furious. To ask him what type of girl he thought she was. Instead, images flashed in front of her like pictures from TV show: the living room with the pap-coloured walls. A shared toilet with a cistern that never contained water; anyone wishing to use the latrine had to first of all fetch a bucket of water from the tap in the middle of the compound.... (39- 40)

This shows that although Sisi is aware that the job being offered is beneath her level of education, the thought of the financial prosperity overwhelms her and causes her to make the perilous journey abroad. She is not the type of girl who will go as low for such a job, because to her degree can manage to give her a decent job in Nigeria. She even gets annoyed with Dele for having thought of such job for her. Instead of sticking to her principles, she thinks of how poor her parents are and how she cannot find a job after so many job applications with no reply nor interviews. She rather goes for Dele's proposal instead of facing the poverty and joblessness in Nigeria with her parents and boy friend Peter, who does not have a better job either and has five siblings to look after. While in Belgium, she regrets the kind of life she lives and wishes to change back the hand of time. People make it someday somehow after so many obstacles.

Life itself is a challenge that needs to be faced by living; when there is life there is hope. Chisom only needed to be patient. Moreover, she is not the one to fulfil her parents' failed dreams. It is a lesson she needs to learn from not going against her own rules in order to satisfy others' wants. It is true children have to assist parents when they get old but it does not mean doing the unimaginable. Once parents have failed in their duty of providing for their children, the only thing to do is to learn from it, and look for a leeway rather than being

carried away by huge amounts of money in foreign currencies that have little or no value in the country where they are made. Chisom herself realises that even though she makes what by Nigerian standards is a fortune, most of it is geared towards paying her debt to Dele. She regrets her decision afterwards thus:

The amount she was supposed to pay every month echoed in her head. Five hundred. Five hundred. Five hundred. Five hundred...she lay on her side, her hands between her thighs, her eyes still shut. Five hundred. Five hundred. Five hundred...Five hundred Euros was a lot of money. If she converted that to naira, it amount to more money than she had ever dreamed of making in a single month.... (157)

The above lines justifies Sisi's move from illusion to disenchantment; as the choice of her job causes her to have sleepless and restless nights. She, indeed, socially constructs an exotic, sexualized code of black womanhood.

On Black Sisters' Street centres on the experiences and voices of the women, who are usually observed from the outside, as sexual spectacles sitting under red spot lights behind the windows of the Schippers Kwartier of Antwerp. At first sight, the novel offers the reader a voyeuristic glance into these women's lives, and seems to draw from the kind of tragic sensationalism with which recent accounts on victimized Muslim women allow Western readers a peek behind the veil. Although lengthy scenes describe how the women are confronted by all sorts of deprivations, violence and abuses both in Nigeria as well as in Belgium, the novel's aim is to deplore the miserable fate of black sex workers who are victims in Dele's women's trafficking network as well as in the male-dominated Western sex industry:

Determined not to turn run (where was she running?), she tried to calm herself by dressing with a favour she did not feel. She pulled on the skirt Madam had chosen. Clenched her teeth and reached behind to pull up the zipper...she looked at the blouse. Laughed. Pulled it over her breast with aggression. She pursed delirious thoughts that made her wish she could smash things. She had a degree for Peter's sake... (172)

In this light, Sisi becomes somebody she never imagined; dressing up in a mini skirt and a blouse that exposes her chest. Her parents would never allowed her go out dressed in such an

attire. She also takes alcohol, something strange. We see her moving slowly from her dreams into self destruction. Now she has to do everything to maintain her new self; which is that of annihilation:

Apart from the fact that it was too expensive, it had been too expensive a habit for her to cultivate back in Lagos, she did not appreciate its salty bitterness. It did not lift her to any heights. She had often wondered why people drank bottles after bottle of the stuff. Now she wondered if she would start drinking bottle after bottle to forget...I can't do this, Sisi thought ...this is not me. I am not here. I am home, sleeping in my bed. This is not me. This is not me. This is somebody else. Another body...This is a dream. But i need the money. (180-181)

We discover from the above citation that, Sisi was not an alcoholic, but because she desperately needs to get money through the fastest means, she is obliged to do as other prostitutes – drink heavily. She has forgotten who she is; a university degree holder, someone people looked up to and loved. She needs this money by all means forgetting where she is coming from. She does what pleases Madam through her outfits and comportments; else she will be abandoned in the streets or sent back to Nigeria. She lives like a prisoner in Belgium, contrary to the life she used to live in Nigeria. One cannot completely be happy, or be at peace or be free out of his or her own homeland. Similarly, the abandonment of her family and lover in Nigeria is seen as a movement from illusion to disenchantment. While in Belgium, she misses them, especially Peter, when she is faced with an ugly stranger in a bar in which she has no other option than to have sex with him because Madam has said so(236). The above discussion show us that Sisi's illusion is that of offering a good life to her family, the kind of life her parents failed to provide them.

Another thing that greatly frustrates these women is their inability to form meaningful marital bonds with men. Men either rape them or use them and dump them. Alek leaves Sudan after having been raped and then follows a Nigerian soldier who claims to love her but later abandons with a lame excuse that her mother has forbidden him from marrying a refugee. Ikheloa states that “The chapter named *Alek (Joyce)*, reads like an exhausted affirmative action afterthought. The character was developed as coming from Sudan, escaping the war, ending up in Nigeria and then Europe after her soldier-lover got bored with her” (p 9). This shows Sisi's disenchantment is caused by unreciprocated love from Peter. Simon de Beauvoir in Anne Minas' *Gender Basics (The Woman in Love)*, maintains:

The word love has by no means the same sense for both sexes, and this is one cause of serious misunderstandings that divide them...the single word love in fact signifies two different things for man and woman. What woman understands by love is clear enough: it is not only devotion, it is a total gift of body and soul, without reservation, without regarding for anything whatever. This unconditional nature of her love is what makes it a faith, the only one she has. (178)

This quote explains Alek's utter frustration and agony when she is abandoned by the only man whom she has loved. She prefers to leave Nigeria and settle for a life of prostitution where men will not deceive her anymore. As for Sisi, she realises that Peter cannot make her become what she dreams of, since he is just a poor teacher with five siblings to cater for. He cannot marry her and provide for her needs which is what most African women dream of. Her decision to travel abroad causes misunderstanding in their relationship to the extent that she does not read Peter's letter. It is her fear of sinking in the absolute of passion together with Peter, who cannot provide for her needs, that pushes her to leave. She realises that being trapped in the throes of passion with him is tantamount to death. This is what Simone de Beauvoir still in Anne Menas' *Gender Basics*, calls *Tristan and Isolde* myth: "Two lovers destined solely for each other are already dead: they die of ennui, of the slow agony of love that feeds on itself" (181).

Unfortunately for Sisi, she cannot shy away from death, she runs away from emotional death into real death as she loses her life while on the field of prostitution. Death here is the deferment of Sisi's dreams. This means that, life on the street is as hard as the concrete on which the prostitutes walk. With every client, Sisi found fears, regrets because she is exposed to robbery, rape or can be beaten. With these elements of dangers that constantly surround her, we ask ourselves why some women would choose this path.

Her denial of reading Peter's letter also means that she does not want to have anything in common with him again. In fact, she wants to forget about him, because thinking of him, is reminding herself of her past. Amid this, the thought of her family, and especially Peter, hunts her while in Belgium:

Her thoughts wandered to her present and she asked herself how they were, what they were doing. She thought of Peter, almost wishing that things had been different. He would have made a good husband, a considerate one, the sort who

would wash his wife's clothes if she were indisposed, maybe even cook for her.

(102)

She cannot move forward without going backward. In other words, it is always important to trace our roots (where we come), so that, with our minds clear from others' curses or anger, we can succeed in everything we do. Who knows, maybe her death is as a consequence of Peter's anger towards her. His love for her was pure, yet he is being betrayed.

In the same light, Sisi finds herself with a man she never thought she will listen to if he called her on a street. Men who say she does not do her job well, that her performance is poor and that they were never coming back for her services: "the girl who used to stay here, she knew her job. You just waste my money! Today I have no release. No release! I have to masturbate" (210). She sells her body to strangers who are ugly; some have teeth that are too wide and eyes that are too wide apart. She cannot believe her present life. This makes her to hate herself, as she is afraid to look herself in the mirror when she is taking her bath. She is not comfortable with the job she now owns. Yet she needed a job so badly, but this is more than slavery:

She went to work and her smile stayed on. She greeted her clients and it did not falter. She thanked them when they tipped her. When they complimented her. When they said she was not like a lot of black prostitutes who tried to wrangle more money than was originally agreed upon. The smile stayed on. But an unhappiness permeated behind her skin and wound itself around her neck and forced her head down so that, she walked as if something shamed her. (212)

She feels guilty about her choice of job though no one questions her about the kind of life she lives. She makes more money but it does not change the fact that her dreams have been deferred. While in Nigeria, she did not think all this. She hates herself and uses sponge to sponge her whole body, so that all the smells of her countless customers can get off her body. She can no longer bear to look herself in the mirror even when she is the only one around. In fact, this new life, according to her, is that which nobody would ever want to go in for, but she needs the money, which is her illusion. She regrets why she left Nigeria in the first place, and especially why she had to meet someone like Dele on her path:

While she had never been comfortable in her job, there was now a certain aversion added to the discomfort in her job. She could no longer bear to look herself, not even when she was alone. When she took a bath, she sponged her

body without once looking at it. Regrets assailed her day in day out. She smiled but behind that smile her regret grew bigger and bigger, its shadow casting a pall over her. She began to think she had never left home, ruining the day she met Dele. Why, oh why, had she gone to his office? Why had she been taken in by his promises of wealth and glamour and happiness that knew no bounds? (212)

The above quote expresses her realisation that her dreams have been completely shattered and that coming to Belgium was the greatest mistake she made. By the time Sisi returns to Nigeria, she is no longer her former self. She is a shadow of who she used to be. Moreover, her eventual murder, as she tries to escape Dele's network, is testament to the fact that her dreams had been completely deferred and the future had nothing in store for her.

It does not also augur well for the three surviving girls as they think of the expectations of their families back home. The writer recounts the contents of Joyce's consciousness thus:

'It is odd isn't it? Sisi is dead and everything's going on as normal'. Joyce says. ..When a stranger's corpse is being carried, it is as if it is mere firewood...Is Sisi's body already decaying? How long does it take before a corpse starts to rot? A few hours? A few days? How long did it take for mother and father to rot? And my brother, Ater? They must be rotten by now. Three years is a time for a corpse isn't it? She does not want to think about her family, decayed. (214 & 247)

The imagery of corpses rotting shows Joyce's realisation of the emptiness and futility of their lives. Just as their families back home, they too will end up as rotting corpses. As it is usually said, where there is life, there is hope for a brighter future.

Ama on her part after being raped resorts to selling at Mama Eko's restaurant. She thinks the woman cannot offer the kind of life she dreams of; a better life where she can save enough money to set up her own business. While selling in this restaurant, she comes across a pimp called Dele, who has his business partner called Madam in Belgium. Dele convinces Ama to believe his fake stories: "I go straight to the point...you no be small gal. Na woman you be. Mature woman. I go tell you wetin it be. I need women. Fine, fine women like you make dem go work for abroad for me. For Europe. For Belgium" (140). She is convinced that she is a very beautiful woman, so needs to show the world her beauty, by dressing half naked and walking up and down the streets of Antwerp in Belgium. Also, she thinks that since

Brother Cyrile has taken advantage of her (free of charge) and has not been condemned, this is an opportunity to go through the same process but with the benefit of earning money:

Brother Cyril had taken what he wanted, no questions asked. No 'please' and 'may' or 'could I'. And a discarding of her when she no longer sufficed. And strange men taking and paying for her services. And it would not be in Lagos. But overseas. Which earned you respect just for being there. It was not like she would be standing outside nightclubs in Lagos Island, hoping that she would not run into someone who recognized her. So Why not? (141)

Ama's mind, as depicted above, has been scarred by Brother's Cyril's rape. She is traumatised by her rape from a Christian brother of all people. In her warped mentality, she believes that since Brother Cyrile got it for free and without any permission, it is better for her to go to a place where men at least ask for it and pay afterwards. Also, nobody will dare to ask her why she is doing this or that.

For Joyce, she did not plan this; Polycarp, her boyfriend helps her travel to Belgium as the best way of compensating her for not marrying her after years of a promising relationship. Neglecting what she meant to him, he thinks that the wealth of Europe can make up for the agony and loss he has caused this poor refugee girl. He totally heeds to her mother's advice of not getting married to a stranger and thinks going abroad would make Joyce forget about him. Notwithstanding, patriarchy and African tradition, gives the African man complete powers over the woman and it is important to note here that, some feminists have argued that the concept of gender has been structurally defined to fit into the bias of patriarchy. In such a society, the man's pride and respect in the community is determined by standing up for those norms. Polycarp's tradition stresses that he must only marry a girl from his clan:

'I am the oldest son, and my parents want me to marry an Igbo girl. Its not you, Alek, but I can't marry a foreigner. My parents will never forgive me...I am sorry...I am really sorry...I know you can't go back to Sudan. You want to leave Nigeria? Go abroad? I remember you said once that your father had hoped you could all go abroad. I know a man who who'll help you. I will pay him, and he can get you into London. America. Anywhere you choose.' (192-193)

It is so pathetic that Joyce falls for this deceit. She actually accepts to travel to Belgium believing that it might help her overcome her pain and loss. Unfortunately, instead of the job of a nanny promised her, she ends up as a sex worker on the cold streets of Belgium hence leading once again to the deferment of her dreams.

On her part, Efe leaves Nigeria and abandons her son to her sister Rita in order to better plan his life. Like the others, before leaving Nigeria, Efe is disappointed by the father of her son. Knowing fully well that this man is married, Efe keeps dreaming of a future with him. She thinks that because she has given him a son, Titus the father will never ignore them because in most African societies, than their female counterparts. A male child is considered a blessing as he is a potential successor. The female child, on her part, is not valued because her job is to get married and bear children. Efe finds it strange when Titus does not fight for his male child. This defers her dreams and causes her to abandon both father and son for a life of prostitution abroad.

From the above analysis, we can conclude that this novel is not only a tale of choices and displacement set against the backdrop of the Antwerp prostitution scenes, but it also reveals itself to be a book that theorizes its own cultural mobility. While, like Unigwe, on their arrival to Belgium the four protagonists of the book enter a social imaginary in which they perform the already pronounced role of the exotic black woman which is available to them, our work underscores on the one hand how the women perform this role and on the other hand situates their performance in the larger context of their individual experiences, suggesting it is but one out of many strategic narratives they choose to narrate about themselves. The analysis also proved that the female characters have their dreams deferred by many forces that include the harsh socio-economic conditions at home, their ignorance and naivety, and by the agency of patriarchy. Finally, we emphasise that even though their dreams are deferred both at home and abroad, it is abroad that they sink into utter despair. The next chapter is going to examine the characters' arduous task of restoring their fragmented identities amid a backdrop of total annihilation.

CHAPTER THREE

CHANGING ONE SLOUGH FOR ANOTHER: TOWARDS RESTORING THE SELF

Our primary concern in this section is the tension between Unigwe's protagonist's awareness of the social construction of their origin on the one hand, and their acceptance of looking forward to correct their own mistakes on the other hand. This chapter brings out the ladies past and how things would have been had it been they stayed in their different countries to face the challenges therein. This part also shows how cultural discourses that hyper eroticise the female body determine the way in which the Unigwe's four African sex workers in the red-light district of the Belgian city of Antwerp become African sex workers. It argues that the novel formally and thematically resists these popular cultural perceptions in favour of rendering more diverse, subtle representations of the women. By so doing, this will help us understand that, one's slough is not just inherited, but is constructed by one's environment and could be changed depending on the circumstances. The self, in other words, could be articulated or rearticulated in a new way, thus giving rise to new processes of identification.

The "act of talking" (237) helps the young ladies to recover their lost selves. Tunca avers that one of these girls Sisi tries to salvage her subjectivity by engaging in the "act of talking" with her neighbour which she describes as a very crucial since it means someone still sees her "more than a toy" (*Black Sisters*' 237). Tunca adds that "The fact that the women use words as means of subverting their objectified condition points to the decisive role played by storytelling in the characters' attempt to regain subjectivity, both at the fictional and the metafictional levels" (8). The narrator recounts that

And in between customers she talked with the woman from Albania who rented the booth beside hers. ... They talked about their childhoods. Sisi made hers up. And she was sure the Albanian woman did too. They were people without any past, people with forgotten pasts, so whatever was said would have to be made up of air. But that did not matter. The act of talking meant a lot more than what was talked about. (237)

Despite these discussions, Tunca notes "To the eyes of the men in the red light district, Sisi even loses all humanity and becomes mere merchandise" (8). She adds that Sisi's status as a "commodity" on display is reinforced by her association with chocolate and coffee (incidentally, foodstuffs whose fabrication relies in many cases on raw material from Africa).

Her past “forgotten” (237). Moreover, while acknowledging that this is a crucial first step towards restoring a shattered self, we wish to argue that for that act of talking to dig traumatized people out of despair, the talk must be meaningful talk and not useless talk fraught with lies and insincerity. For talking to be helpful in a traumatic experience such as what the girls go through, it must be truth and go back and forth in time.

It is by an honest confrontation with the past that the protagonists in the novel are able to restore their sense of being. By recounting their past experiences these characters in a way reminisce the value of their former lives and are thus able to begin the process of recovery from all the harrowing experiences they have had on the streets of Zwartzusterstraat. It is only when Sisi tries to escape the prostitution world and is murdered, that Ama, Efe and Joyce work through her death by gradually revealing their painful histories to each other. Sisi is a university graduate who struggles to get a job in Nigeria with no avail. Efe is a teenage single mother struggling to raise her son without support from his father. Ama has escaped an abusive childhood only to find her dream of escaping Nigeria crushed by a dead-end job. Joyce, without family, home or money, is abandoned by her boyfriend. In a house on Zwartzusterstraat in the city of Antwerp, the women share their lives under the watchful eyes of their Madam and her menacing assistant Segun. However, as illegal workers in Belgium, the women hide their true names and family histories from each other.

Furthermore, Efe’s, Ama’s and Joyce’s mutual sharing of their past undoubtedly allows them to establish a closer rapport with each other. Before Sisi’s murder, the flat in the Zwartzusterstraat was admittedly “like a family home” (273), but the women had no more than “a relationship which skimmed the surface like milk” (239). Upon hearing about Sisi’s death, Efe, Ama and Joyce start to tell each other their life stories, and it is only after this process of communal discovery that Ama declares that “Now [they] are sisters” (290). Importantly, the women’s confessions allow them to reject their condition of “people without any past” (237), and their revelations parallel the reclaiming of their identities.

The characters also try to maintain their dignity by using fake names. They hope to one day change from this ugly phase of their lives, (as a snake changes its slough) and return to their former selves. Alek is the only one who unwillingly undergoes a change of name probably because she is coerced into prostitution. When she is introduced by her boyfriend Polycarp to Dele, the pimp who arranges for the four women to come to Antwerp, the Yoruba man deems her name unsuitable:

The fat man nodded at Alek and said, “the name has to go. Alek. Sound too much like Alex. Man’s name. We no wan’ men. Oti oo. Give am woman name. Fine fine name for fine gal like her ... Make I see...Cecilia? Nicole? Joyce? ... Joyce. Yes. Joyce. Dat one sound like name wey dey always jolly. Joooooyce!”
(196 -197)

The name chosen by Dele for Alek, Joyce, is of course heavily ironic - her immigration to Belgium and her job as a prostitute does not fetch her any joy. Her renaming is a serious attack on her gender identity. To Westerners, the name sounds masculine, but to her and in her African society it does not, because many names are genderless in African society and because she was named after her grandmother. Secondly, since the young heroine was named after her grandmother, Dele’s obliteration of the name also amounts to the blotting out of her family history.

The erasure of Alek’s identity goes hand in hand with her objectification: “on the long flight to Brussels, she is said to “feel like cargo with a tag” (190). While the word “cargo” obviously refers to her new condition as an “item” for sale, the term also clearly refers to the transatlantic slavery and slave trade. This is evident from the depiction of an auction held in Brussels in which the narrator recounts thus:

The women would be called into the room one at a time for the buyers to see and admire. They would all have numbers, for names were not important. Their names would be chosen by whoever bought them. Names that would be easy for white clients to pronounce. Easy enough to slide off their tongues. Nothing longer than two syllables and nothing with the odd combinations of consonants that make African names difficult for fragile tongues. ‘Number three, ladies and gentlemen. Number three is the type of woman white men like. Thin lips. Pointed nose. Sweet ikebe.’ He slapped her bare buttocks. Number three smiled. (239)

The buying and selling of these girls as well as their renaming by their new “owners,” is clearly reminiscent of the slave trade, more so by the fact that Efe, later becomes a “Madam” reflecting the complicity of the Africans in the enslavement of other Africans for capital gain.

Nevertheless, the narrative also makes clear that all the women except Alek enter prostitution wilfully. Unlike Alek, Sisi, for example, she could have decided not to come to Belgium for prostitution. Unlike Alek still, Sisi is not forced to change her name, nationality

and place of birth. She changes her name by her own volition for a different reason of preserving her dignity, which she hopes to return to one day:

She had decided already to adopt a name that she would wear in her new life. Sisi. Sister in Shona. ... She would re-name herself Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence, at least for a while. And once she hit it big she would reincarnate again as Chisom. (41)

The phrase “at least for a while” confirms the view that her name change is due to her realization that her success in Belgium and eventually reintegration into her Nigerian or any other society is contingent on this concealment. Chisom deliberately creates an alter-ego for herself, whose supposed familiarity is suggested in the very meaning of her adopted name. Yet, while she is initially confident that she will be able to “shed her skin like a snake and emerge completely new” (98), her first experience with a Belgian client is not the effortless re-birth she had expected. She tries to get through this degrading moment by convincing herself that her body is in reality not hers:

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. ... [The man’s] penis searched for a gap between her legs. Finding warmth, he sighed, spluttered sperm that trickled down her legs like mucus, inaugurating Sisi into her new profession. And she baptised herself into it with tears, hot and livid, down her cheeks, salty in her mouth, feeling intense pain... (181)

Even more strikingly than Sisi’s tears, the man’s semen evidences the humiliating “baptis[m]” of the young woman’s new persona. The sexual exploitation of her body, and her mind’s simultaneous efforts at convincing herself that “[t]his is not [her],” fittingly illustrate the growing conflict between her physical situation and her mental state. Counter to her initial assumption, she cannot prevent her “strang[e] yet familiar” incarnation (44) from metamorphosing into “a different person,” “somebody else” (236). To the eyes of the men in the red light district, Sisi even loses all humanity and becomes mere merchandise:

She learned to twirl to help [the potential customers] make up their minds, a swirling mass of chocolate flesh, mesmerising them, making them gasp and yearn for a release from the ache between their legs; a coffee-coloured dream luring them in with the promise of heaven. ... (203)

It is evident from the experience above that the change of name does not really help the girls to bear the shame and trauma of prostitution.

It is only when the characters revert to their old names by telling them to each other that their former sense of self is restored to them. The narrator says that to Alek, the mention of the name she was robbed of “sounds like a homecoming” (138). After telling her real names, it seems as though *Alek* has retrieved her individuality, for “Alek smiled through Joyce’s tears” (239). At that moment, Joyce is presented as a mask from which Alek has finally emerged after years of hiding.

As for Sisi, who never completes her plan, who never reveals her identity to her friends, it is ironical that she perishes. This suggests that the revelation of their names helps to preserve their lives. After her death, the women realise that they do not even “kno[w] Sisi’s real name” (34), and neither do they “know her people” (38). As a consequence, they are unable to send her body to her family in Nigeria. For Sisi, this quest for meaning takes the form of walks around the city of Antwerp, during which she poses as a wealthy foreign tourist, entering shops and trying on gold and diamond rings that she never buys (221). It could be argued that Sisi fools herself into believing that she can fight her objectified condition by pretending to exert power over objects, be they the expensive items of jewellery she feigns to purchase, or the mounts of cheap souvenirs she acquires. Sisi’s constant roaming, a habit she already developed in Lagos, also seems to testify to her wish to escape her own existence, and even to symbolise the paths she has taken in her journey through life. Significantly, as her sense of despair becomes deeper and she realises that her life has been filled with so much mistakes and that she is always stepping in the mistaken direction, her walks around Antwerp increase in both frequency and length. Eventually, Sisi becomes a prisoner of her own misguided choices, in other words, contributes to her own subjection. When she decides to leave prostitution and get rid of Sisi in order to become Chisom again, it was very late. “Sisi’s body is already decaying” (247), she fails to realise that the murder of her Doppelganger amounts to her own death. In the end, Chisom cannot be reclaim anymore in her life, and disengage herself from Sisi, the two (Sisi and Chisom) seem to have become one.

While *On Black Sisters’ Street* acknowledges the impact of the characters’ decisions on their fates, it does not lay the blame solely at their door. Efe, Ama and Sisi, especially, are presented as both innocent victims of, and willing participants in, societies which promote the idea that happiness can be acquired only through material wealth. Efe, for example, sleeps with Titus, a rich married businessman, because his money allows her to buy trendy clothes

for herself and gifts for her siblings - in other words, it is her precarious financial situation that encourages her to engage in a form of prostitution even before going to Belgium:

Efe discovered sex at sixteen behind her father's house. That first experience was so painful in its ordinariness that she had spent days wanting to cry...she felt somewhat cheated, like pikin wey dem give coin wey no di shine at all at all. She remembered nothing but a wish that it would not last too long and that the pain between her legs would be ver well compensated. (45)

Later, she decides to swap her two cleaning jobs in Lagos for the one in Antwerp because her most important goal is to provide "a better life" for her son. However, she does not realise that her belief in the absolute power of money will lead to her estrangement from her child, whom she leaves behind in Nigeria.

Similarly, Sisi thinks that happiness can only be reached through affluence and social status. Despite her university degree, she is unable to find a job in Lagos, and her frustrating experiences lead her to believe that "everything is for sale" in Nigeria. Therefore, she decides to leave for Belgium in the hope that the money she makes there will enable her to buy her father "some respect" in the form of a chieftaincy title in their village. Later, she internalises the association between wealth and respect to such a degree that, when she goes on a shopping spree in Antwerp, she cannot resist holding the bag of the expensive boutique where she has just bought clothes "in such a way that its name showed" (244). In other words, Sisi seems to be misguided in systematically equating social status with happiness, yet her desire for money never leads her to indulge in the moral depravity of the likes of her pimp Dele. On the contrary, Sisi initially decides to enter prostitution because it is in her mind the only way that she can put together cash sincerely. Tragically, her plight and eventual death stem at once from society's brutal realities, from her somewhat naïve interpretation of these harsh rules and, paradoxically, from her sense of self-respect.

Rendering her account of the journey to Belgium, Ama says: "I made this choice, at least, I was given a choice. I came here with my eyes wide open" (99). All of the four women are indeed not victims, but agents in a transnational world making choices, strategic choices that are restricted by circumstance:

what kind of job I go dey wan fine fine women to do for? Na for to wash clothes? Ugly woman fit wash clothes, too! I no need fine woman for dat. I think say you na mature woman. Why you want disappoint me? ...Ama looked at him. Stupid fucking man. What do u think I am? I look like ashawo to you? (140)

Meaning that Ama knew the kind of job she was going in for Belgium. Feeling disappointed by her own mother, she wants to make money and own her own business in order to show “fucking” Brother Cyril that he did not destroy her life. Neither did she need her mother nor their “fucking” blinding whiteness standing in her way, preventing her from achieving all her dreams. In other words, for these ladies to be successful as sex workers, the women are to abide by gendered and racialised norms and codes of behaviour.

As sex workers, these women adopt what Brouillete Franck calls strategic exoticism (sainsburysebooks.co.uk). This is a kind of strategic compliance that these ladies adopt since they have no freedom to do as they please in order for them to survive their desperate conditions they have to do (at least for the time being) as they are told by their mistress. This is as a result of the agonizing diasporic sex positions in which they find themselves in the Antwerp sex industry. The four protagonists cannot generally be seen to change or subvert the normative scripts they must follow; until Sisi’s failed attempt to escape at the end of the novel, the women almost conscientiously do, say and behave according to what Madam and others tell them. This is all in a bid to preserve their lives and their reputations from being destroyed by the heartless traffickers. They stand the risk of either being killed as Sisi or of having their secrets exposed to the home communities by the smugglers thereby ruining their hopes of one day reintegrating into their societies.

However, the manner in which they exercise this strategic exoticism is still leads to feelings of doubts, uncertainty, embarrassment or feelings of freedom, while being disguised. This can be seen from the myriad scenes where these women are seen to take an emotional distance. Unigwe describes what goes on in the heads of the women, while they try to the best of their capabilities to please the men that approach them. In so doing, their work is revealed to the reader as a strategic lie. Joyce piously scrubs the make-up off her face on request of a regular customer who calls her “Etienne’s Nubian princess”. She is ready to change the script and to change costume, as it were, whenever this is desired. Her ultimate goal is not, however, to please white men’s desire. The latter is but a means to achieve economic purposes and upward social mobility. To Ama, all her customers (men she

slept with) were just a means for her to use in order to achieve all her dream. And her dream was expansive enough to contain all of them.

The strategies they act out or perform might give the impression that behind the scenes these women live better lives. However, we soon realise that in their daily lives, they still experience serious identity issues since they must hide their true identities from even their closest friends. Madam tells Sisi to narrate a false story about how she left Liberia: “White people enjoy such stories. They love to hear us killing each other, about us hacking each other’s heads off in senseless ethnic conflicts. The more horrid the account the better Sisi agrees to be Liberian, (149). In the nearest future, she would be something else. A regular yearning to escape herself would cause her her life While the performance of sexualised definitions of black womanhood is central to the four women’s lives as sex workers, the family histories which they first tell each other emphasise their identities as a series of narratives invented strategically to suit the circumstances.

The four ladies, in order to restore their sense of self, reject generalised definitions of black womanhood. They do not act according to the stereotypes that have been constructed about their otherness in the West. This suggests that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding. In so doing, Unigwe’s concept of identity according to Linda Anderson also embraces “contingency, indeterminacy and conflict” (qtd in Paul Gilroy 128). It deploys a range of narrative techniques refuting the static and single-sided ideas about female blackness with which the four women are confronted during their work in the red-light district. Aspects of the detective novel are incorporated in the “whodunit’ search for an explanation for Sisi’s death, features of travel writing in Sisi’s jaunts about Antwerp disguised as a tourist, and magical realism in Sisi’s flight from her body to visit her parents and curse Dele’s family after her death. “ In the instant between almost dying and cold-stone dead, the instant when her soul is still able to fly, Sisi escaped her body and flew down to Lagos. First, she went to the house in Ogba”(251). “Once it left Ogba, Sisi’s soul found herself where she had never been. A house in Aje...Dele was talking loudly into a telephone (252). “May your lives be bad. May you never enjoy love. May your father suffer as much as mine when he hears i am gone. May you ruin him” (254). These are all different aspects that show the hidden strengths of each woman and help them to reconstruct their battered sense of identity.

In order therefore to expose how these women express their heroism, the author uses a multiplicity of authorial voices. She does not prioritise a single authorial voice or just the experiences of a single protagonist. This makes her novel to read as a series of fictional

autobiographies, presenting diverse narratives of four women. Its form could also be described as a particular type of short story cycle, termed by Sandra A. Zagarell as “narrative of community”. Zagarell advances a theory of a women’s genre that denotes a text’s ethos and subject matter, a privileging of community over self and a concern with process rather than linear narrative’s conflict or progress. Though Zagarell’s focus is on nineteenth century women’s short story cycles, her insights are fruitful to twentieth-century narratives of community [which] “may be inspired most strongly by writers’ own racial, ethnic, class, and or cultural traditions, and the changing roles of gender” (Zagarell 527). Zagarell’s view of the short story cycle reverberates in unexpected ways with the “relationality of subjectivity” that Moore-Gilbert identifies as one of postcolonial autobiography’s central features (qtd in Moore-Gilbert xx).

Finally, the characters are able to take decisive actions in order to redefine themselves. Eventually, Ama and Joyce return to Nigeria, Efe stays in Belgian prostitution but moves up on the social scale as she now employs African women. Sisi’s ghost leaves her body and travels back to Nigeria too. Their different actions according to Tunca “rejects essentialist notions of black female identity, while simultaneously insisting on a commonality of experience (12). We read in the novel that their different thoughts sometimes converge and meet in the present, causing them to share the same fear. But when they think about their past, they have different memories” (40). In her view, this makes *On Black Sisters’ Street* a truly polyphonic collection of individual stories creating a mosaic portrayal that counters the essentialist vision of the exotic African woman. Its mode of narration reflects the multidimensional mobility of African migrant women.

Furthermore, the women living together in the African microcosm in their house on Zwartzusterstraat are supposed to share Nigeria as their place of origin, but they are not bound by anything except for their situation in the present. So do not try to rely on the commonality of their nationality or origins as a way of their difficulties. They realise that they have different experiences and as a result, different problems which needs different solutions and outcomes. So even though they share their stories, it is only to lighten the burden within them. They are wise enough to realise that each person will have to construct her own path to recovery and restoration. As we come to know their individual life stories, it is gradually conveyed that these women have had very different lives and would not be in contact in normal circumstances. The women share no sense of belonging or commonality based on their national or cultural background. When at a party a South African man addresses her as his sister, Ama vehemently replies that she is not his sister, and turns her

back on him. The rejection of family ties is suggestive, also for the mutual relationships among the four protagonists. Though they share the same house, their conceptions of home and family are not defined in national or cultural terms. The house, is a metaphor for the four black women's community in Europe - a place of conflict that offers no true sense of belonging, it is a cold place without a heart(h), "Inside the house, Efe, Ama and Joyce are gathered in a room painted in tongues of fire...its black colour fading with age... (23).

The women know little about each other and feelings of hostility and suspicion prevent them from developing intimate relations. They always see each other as strangers without offering any word; "they are mostly silent"(23). "Nobody knows Sisi's real name" (34). The women shroud their histories in ambiguity or keep them covered. It is silence which has, again become the community they share. In the course of narrating their histories to each other, however, they develop a sense of belonging in each other's company. Through the intimacies of storytelling, the women discover their communal bond and shared predicament, which gradually ignites a sense of home. It is indeed the act of story telling that constitutes the women's community in the house, which in the penultimate section, is described: like a family house, the kitchen and living room Ama, Efe and Joyce share, binds them together. They always meet there whenever they feel lonely and hunger for company but could always leave for their rooms for some time alone. That was where they could escape the frown of the type of life they lived in Zwarte Zusterstraat; a life that was free from all those strange men with whom they shared their beds.

It is Efe who initiates camaraderie among the women through story telling after Sisi's death, because in grief "she feels an affinity with these women in a way she has never done before" (38). Her history involves painful memories of a pregnancy at the age of sixteen, when she was laughed at by the neighbouring women in Lagos who excluded her from the community. The status of outsider, combined with her mother's early death and her father's unfriendliness towards his family closeness, had ruptured the sense of safety and belonging that are conventionally associated with notions of home. In a similar vein, Joyce, whose family is brutally murdered and whose lover severs their relationship to appease his family, recognizes that the women in the house on Zwarte Zusterstraat were the only family she had. "Later, when she thinks of these conversations with Ama and Efe, she will think of it as a release from something she had not known held her hostage" (207). In the face of the already pronounced social role of the exotic, sexualised black woman that constitutes their becoming in Belgium, the protagonists of *On Black Sisters' Street* do not only negotiate a diverse, narrative sense of selfhood, but also a

black women's community which does not depend on ethnic origins, cultural descent, gender, geographical or national affiliations but rather on empathy and understanding which develop through listening to each other's distinctive histories and personal memories.

In a nutshell, we will say that an apparently anecdotal incident occurring towards the beginning of the novel perfectly summarises the issues that we have tried to raise in this chapter. At a party, a black South African man tries to grab Efe's hand and calls her "sister" (12), to which the young woman emphatically replies: "I'm not your sister" (12). Efe's aggressive reaction first of all fittingly illustrates the narrative's rejection of the idea of a unified Africa. The point is clearly evoked in relation to the black diasporic communities in Antwerp, but it is also reinforced by some of the distressing events that unfold on the African continent itself - the armed conflict that kills Alek's family, and the cultural pressures that lead her boyfriend to send her away, are but two examples of this. This study further suggests that the fragmentation of Africa can be traced back to the intolerance of some of its inhabitants, whether this prejudice takes the form of benign banter about Ghanaian cooking or that of ethnic hatred with devastating consequences. Finally, *On Black Sisters' Street* exposes how black womanhood is not merely about taking up the role of the exotic sexualised black woman in the popular European perception, but also, and perhaps more importantly so, about how women across the limits of cultures and social forces of power and domination, improvise and find spaces to re-describe themselves, while creating their transnational worlds anew. The next chapter discusses how *On Black Sisters' Street* can be integrated into an ESL/EFL classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTEGRATING MIGRATION LITERATURE IN AN ESL/EFL CLASSROOM

This chapter examines the inclusion of literature of migration in an English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It also suggests how it can be included as well as the moral benefits of such an inclusion. It begins by looking closely at what migration literature is and why Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* falls under literature for migration. It ends with a sample Literature in English lesson plan to demonstrate how an excerpt from the novel can be used to teach a vocabulary lesson.

It is worth noting that Literature has been a subject of study in many countries at a secondary or tertiary level, but until recently it has been used sparingly in EFL or ESL. However, since the 1980s, this area has attracted more interest among ESL/EFL teachers. There are many good reasons for teaching English through literature in the classroom. Literature is authentic material. It is good to expose learners to this source of unmodified language in the classroom because the skills they acquire in dealing with difficult or unknown language can be used outside the class. Literature also encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich with multiple layers of meaning, and can be extensively explored for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. In addition, Literature expands language awareness. Widdowson avers that when you ask learners to study sophisticated or non-standard examples of language from a poem, novel or play, it can make them more aware of the norms of language use (qtd in Lazar 45).

Moreover, the Competence Based Approach of teaching (which is the prescribed norm of instruction in Cameroonian schools today) emphasizes on the ethical dimension of pedagogy. This implies that besides the subject matter of every lesson, teachers should use every lesson as a means of teaching the students some values or good attitudes. Literature in this light can be a very effective way of achieving this since it educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom. Furthermore, one reason why students perform poorly in examinations is due to the lack of motivation. Literature is motivating. Also, literature holds a high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason, students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of highly respected literature. Also, literature is often more interesting than the texts found in English Language course books. Many people usually say literature is life because it usually reflects the complex and ambiguous realities of

life. Literature is more plausible than isolated sentences or other forms of writing that are not creative.

The next question is what literature for migration is. Migration literature is mostly produced by migrants depicting their or others' experiences. Migration is defined as "the movement of large numbers of people, birds or animals from one place to another" (*Oxford Advanced Dictionary*, 7ed.). It is as old as creation itself. In its modern usage, it refers to the trend of displacement and movement made by individuals with the hope to find more personal convenience or better their material or social conditions. Salman Rushdie in "Step Across This Line" states that "the distinguishing feature of our time is mass migration, mass displacement, globalized finances and industries" (425). Several historical events are behind this mass migration that has picked up speed and volume since the second half of the twentieth century. Among them one may refer to "the second world war, the demise of the British Empire and the subsequent migration from the former colonies to the west" (Sten P. Moslund 1). To these reasons, other factors such as "the emergence of totalitarian regimes" and "technological developments" (Sally Frank 1) can be added. Among the huge numbers of migrants, there have always been intellectuals and artists who had left their land willingly or by force and chosen another part of the world to live in. Examples can be taken from among Arab, Lebanese or Palestinian poets who desperately left their homelands after their occupation by the colonizers. Edward Said himself is a Palestinian who left Palestinian, and migrated to America in his youth.

Restlessness and human desire to move to a better place has had a remarkable effect on literature as well. This has led to the appearance of a new kind of writing, called literature of migration to represent the complex and peculiar experiences. The term migrant literature implies that subject matter will be about migration and the migrant's encounter with the new culture and tradition of the host nation. However, the fact is that although the description of the migration experience and the difficulties of adaptation play a primary role in this literature, actually, migrant literature can be very diverse, either thematically or structurally.

It should be noted that migration literature is not limited to movements from third world countries to second or first world countries. It also includes migration from one developed country to another, probably a more developed one such as from Ireland, Spain, Greece, Latvia, Poland to USA, Britain, Germany or Russia. Examples include great figures like James Joyce, Milan Kundra, Alexander Nabokov and Joseph Conrad, who have all won the Nobel Prize for literature. The experiences of people from rural areas to urban cities as recounted by an author

also fall under this category. Its main aim is to illustrate various narratives of the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of the migrants lives in their alien or host societies.

To speak generally, Adelson says that migration literature would have to include all works “that are produced in a time of migration or that can be said to reflect on migration” (qtd in Walkowitz 533). This means that it describes experiences of migration. It is literature that is unique in its expression of nostalgic feelings and homesickness. This can be a crucial point for the researchers who mistakenly believe that every work which is produced by a migrant author can be called migration literature. The 20th and 21st centuries are characterized by large-scale migration across the world. Bringing about waves of migrants, refugees and exiles, these historical and social events have made the migrant “the protagonist of the 21st century” novel (Frank 1). For more than two centuries the authors and poets have examined in their stories, novels and poems, what it means to be uprooted, willingly or by force, from one’s homeland as well as the problems of adjusting to an entirely new environment.

Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* falls under migration because it handles some of the most important themes in migration literature. Because the novel’s characters try to cope with migration, issues of illusion, deceit, despair, hybridity, insecurity and so on. As earlier mentioned, the story begins with the gruesome murder of one of the African migrants who is working as a prostitute. As her remaining co-workers and house mates, Ama, Efe and Joyce come to terms with her death; they begin to tell their own story of how they found themselves working as prostitutes on the streets of Antwerp (Belgium). Each of them owes an enormous amount of money to Dele, a Nigerian in Lagos, who has facilitated their arrival in Europe as a result they are stuck for sometime in Antwerp. Each recounts their painful journey from Nigeria to Belgium to become sex workers, and how they have been brought together by Dele, a Nigerian pimp. *On Black sisters’ Street* recounts the lives of these four women, whose lives have been crushed at every turn.

Another important question is why teach the Literature for migration, in particular, in ESL/EFL classroom in Cameroonian schools. There are many good reasons for doing so. All the themes or issues that migration literature deals with such as levels of ambivalence, multiculturalism, shifting identities and interpretations are very abiding concerns of the present Cameroonian society. The relationships between people and homelands are so intimate that when people migrate to another part to another they are bound to face problems. This causes a conflict between their old culture and the new one that they have to adapt. The process of constructing a new hybrid identity is usually a very challenging one. Migration literature has often been regarded as being an outcome of tensions between the individual’s desires and opportunities, as a

reflection of past circumstances and expectations for the future. Sten P. Moslund in *Migration Literature and Hybridity* states that we live in constant changes and movements, the immediate result of which is that nothing is stable and borders have become mixed or fluid. The outstanding developments in the field of communication technology such as satellite, TV, Internet and the modern means of transportation followed by the globalization of the world economy are all the influential factors that are making our age that of mobility and borderlessness. The traditional settler life-form has given its place to a new nomadic life style and migration has become a familiar trend. Moslund concludes that “It seems that we are witnessing a massive international and transnational defeat of gravity, an immense uprooting of origin and belonging, an immense displacement of borders, with all the clashes, . . . reshaping the cultural landscapes of the world’s countries and cities” (2). Migration has therefore come to play a very important role in relation to such basic social foundations such as politics, economics, geography and culture.

The 20th and 21st century are characterized by large - scale migration across the world. Bringing about waves of migrants, refugees and exiles, these historical and social events have made the migrant “the protagonist of the 21st century” (Frank 1). Naturally, the phenomenon of migration has influenced the different aspects of social and cultural life, one of which is literature. For more than two centuries the authors and poets have examined in their stories, novels and poems, what it means to be uprooted, willingly or by force, from one’s homeland as well as the problems of adjusting to an entirely new environment. This tradition has a long record in the history of literature and is considered to be one of the influential social and cultural issues of every society.

In *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Chika Unigwe’s views migration as a double-edged sided sword. On one the hand, it is good if Africans go to Europe for good reasons such as vacation, health problems, further studies and opt for descent jobs such as nursing or come back to Africa and develop their continent by applying and teaching the new generation the knowledge gotten from the West. On the other hand, she views migration as a practice to be avoided for it kills African thoughts and cultures. To put it briefly, according to Unigwe, there are many factors that contribute in leading the people to migrate to other countries. She thinks migration has both good and bad effects towards the host and sending countries. As the world’s borders between countries are loosened and multiculturalism is being practiced more often, the future of frequent immigration will bring about a better mutual understanding and make the world a better place.

Students need to know even as they think of finishing secondary school and continue with tertiary or even start working that rushing to the West with no specific study or work plan is likely going to cause more frustration. In order to stop the brain drain that is robbing Africa of its

best human resources, Africans need to stay back home and contribute to the development of their own society. Finally, students need to know that most of the friends and relatives who are abroad are not as rich as they claim when they come back home, some of them are prostitutes in the west. This kind of education is very important for our students in this century

In order therefore to show how this novel can be integrated into an EFL English language classroom we are going to use an excerpt from it to teach a vocabulary lesson bearing in mind contemporary concepts in the teaching of vocabulary. We are going to use an excerpt from the novel to teach vocabulary for a number of reasons. Linda Diamond and Linda Gutlohn in *Vocabulary Handbook* state that vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. They refer to Steven Stahl who also says that “Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world (2). He states that no one can fully master vocabulary knowledge but can increase in it over the course of a lifetime. Teaching vocabulary must go beyond referring words from the dictionary and making sentences with them. This is because vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through explicit instruction in specific words and word-learning strategies. She refers to Michael Graves’ four components of an effective vocabulary program: wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge; instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of texts containing those words; instruction in independent word-learning strategies, and word consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and enhance learning.

Therefore, one of the most effective methods of teaching vocabulary is by explicit instruction where learners are explicitly taught both specific words and word-learning strategies. In this method, students’ knowledge of word meanings is deepened by exposing them to vocabulary in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated vocabulary drills. In this method, the lesson does not begin with a definition of a word since it is only when one knows what a word means that they can define it. Students can be actively involved in discovering the meaning of words by actively thinking deeply about word meanings in creating relationships among words. Diamond and Gutlohn argue that

Research shows that there are more words to be learned than can be directly taught in even the most ambitious program of vocabulary instruction. Explicit instruction in word-learning strategies gives students tools for independently determining the meanings of unfamiliar words that have not been explicitly introduced in class. Since students encounter so many

unfamiliar words in their reading, any help provided by such strategies can be useful. (Par 3)

This quote emphasizes the need for deepening or widening students' knowledge of vocabulary as well as teaching word learning strategies.

When a passage has been chosen from the novel, there are many word learning strategies such as dictionary use, morphemic analysis, and contextual analysis. For EFL students such as the Upper Sixth Bilingue students of Government Bilingual High School Etoug-ebe whose first official language is French, translating cognate awareness is also an important strategy. Dictionary use teaches students about multiple word meanings, as well as the importance of choosing the appropriate definition to fit the particular context. Morphemic analysis is the process of deriving a word's meaning by analyzing its meaningful parts, or morphemes. Such word parts include root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Contextual analysis involves inferring the meaning of an unfamiliar word by scrutinizing the text surrounding it. Instruction in contextual analysis generally involves teaching students to employ both generic and specific types of context clues.

Teachers can also do what Judith A. Scott and William E. Nagy term "fostering word consciousness". They explain in "Developing Word Consciousness," that it is a more general way to help students develop vocabulary by fostering word consciousness, an awareness of and interest in words. Word consciousness is not an isolated component of vocabulary instruction; it needs to be taken into account each and every day (Scott and Nagy 8). It can be developed at all times and in several ways: through encouraging adept diction, through word play, and through research on word origins or histories. According to Graves, "If we can get students interested in playing with words and language, then we are at least halfway to the goal of creating the sort of word-conscious students who will make words a lifetime interest." (14).

Teachers can also teach vocabulary by providing students to multiple exposures of a word's meaning. One principle of effective vocabulary learning is to provide multiple exposures to a word's meaning. When students encounter vocabulary words often, it greatly improves their vocabulary because students need to see a word more than once for it to stick in their long-term memories. This is different from repeating the word many times but seeing it in different and multiple contexts; contexts which literary texts like *On Black Sisters' Street* offer.

It is often assumed that when students do not learn new vocabulary words, they simply need to practice the words more. Research has shown, however, that it is often the case that students simply do not understand the instructional task involved. Rather than focus only on the words themselves, teachers should be certain that students fully understand the instructional tasks. The restructuring of learning materials or strategies in various ways often can lead to increased vocabulary acquisition, especially for low-achieving or at-risk students. Once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary task, they often learn rapidly.

The approach used in the sample lesson plan presented below tries to combine the concepts mentioned above. In it students are not taught words in isolation but are presented with words in a specific context.

LESSON PLAN

SCHOOL: Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ebe

TEACHER: Clarisse Bobyegha Gabsa

SUBJECT: English Language

LESSON: Vocabulary

LESSON TITLE: Slavery

SKILLS: speaking and writing

CLASS: Upper Sixth Bilingue

AGE AVERAGE: 16+

NUMBER ON ROLL: 101

PERIOD: 6th period

TIME: 12:10am -1:20pm

DURATION: 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES: By the end of this lesson, learners of Upper Sixth BIL, should be able to identify some words related to Slavery and make use of them while communicating and this will help them to stand against the continuation of slavery.

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE: The learners of Upper Sixth BIL can already identify and talk about their rights and obligations in their daily communication. For example, the right to go to school and obligation to respect their parents.

TEACHING AIDS: blackboard, chalk, duster, photocopies of a passage.

REFERENCES: Unigwe, Chika. *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.

Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Stages	Content	Teacher's activities	Students' activities	Rationale	Interaction pattern	Duration
Introduction	<p>Lead-in: <u>Revising the obligations and rights of children through the use of “must” and “must not”</u></p> <p>-What must children do/must they not do?</p> <p>-Children must respect their parents and their elders.</p> <p>-Children must keep the environment clean.</p> <p>-Children must read their books and do their homework.</p> <p>- Children must not fight and go to war</p> <p>-Children must not steal nor tell lies.</p> <p>-Name some of your rights, starting with children have the right to</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>-Children have the right to go to school.</p> <p>-Children have the right to healthy living.</p>	<p>Teacher asks questions and appoints learners to answer orally.</p>	<p>Appointed students answer the teacher's questions.</p>	<p>To capture learners' attention to the lesson of the day.</p>	<p>Teacher/Students</p>	<p>10 Min</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Children have the right to eat. -Children have the right to freedom of speech. 					
Present ation	<p>Topic: Slavery.</p> <p><u>Vocabulary relating to Slavery.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not happy -Work hard to make somebody else rich -Treats us like animals -Free -Have the right to our body <p style="text-align: center;">Text</p> <p>They said it was easier for nurses to get a job abroad. We're <u>not happy</u> here. None of us. We <u>work hard to make somebody else rich</u>. Madam <u>treats us like animals</u>. Why are we doing this? And I don't believe that we cannot find an honest policeman. I don't believe that for a second! We report Madam, and who knows, maybe we can even get asylum</p>	<p>Teacher writes the title of the lesson and some words on the blackboard.</p> <p>Teacher reads the text.</p>	<p>Learners observe carefully.</p> <p>Learners listen attentively</p>	<p>To expose to the students the topic to be studied.</p> <p>For learners to be able to use their listening skills in order to identify some of the words and phrases that are commonly used</p>	Teacher/ Students.	25 Min

<p>here. There are always people looking for causes to support us. We can be <u>free</u>. Madam has no <u>right to our bodies</u>, and neither does Dele. I don't want to think that one day I will be dead here and all Madam will do is complain about how bad my dead is for business. I don't know what will happen to us, but I want to make sure, Madam and Dele get punished.</p> <p>Meanings of words in context:</p> <p>-Not happy (somebody who is feeling bad about a situation). My father was not happy when I failed my exams.</p> <p>-Work hard to make somebody else rich (working for the wellbeing of another person and not yours). In 18th centuries, blacks use to work to make the whites happy.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners to say meanings of the words as used them in constructing other sentences.</p>	<p>Students do the task as demanded by the teacher.</p>	<p>when talking about slavery</p> <p>To foster interest and involvement of the text to be read.</p>		
--	---	---	---	--	--

	<p>-Treats us like animals (treating somebody like a slave. Our step-mother is treating us like animals.</p> <p>-Free (doing things the way we want). I have the freedom of speech.</p> <p>-Have the right to our bodies(telling us what to do or what not to do with our bodies). Our bodies belong to God, because we are the temple of the holy spirit.</p>					
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

	<i>Rev. of On Black Sisters Street</i> by Chika Unigwe.					
Practice	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Writing</u> Question</p> <p><u>Answer the following questions in your exercise books:</u></p> <p>-According to the speaker, where is it possible to get a job?</p> <p>-Why do you think they are not happy and are afraid they would die?</p> <p>-What name do you think we can also call this Madam and Dele and the speaker in the text?</p> <p>-Do you think Madam and Dele have the right to treat the speaker the way they do? Why?</p>	<p>Teacher writes the question on the blackboard.</p> <p>Teacher moves round the class and corrects few exercise books.</p>	<p>Students copy and answer the questions in their exercise books.</p> <p>Learners give their books to the teacher for correction.</p>	<p>To verify if learners have understood the text.</p>	<p>Teacher/Students.</p>	<p>5 min</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">Correction: to be done on the blackboard</p> <p>1) The speaker thinks it is possible to get a job abroad.</p> <p>2) They are not happy and are afraid to die because they are being treated like animals by Madam and they did not have the right to their bodies.</p> <p>3) Madam and Dele can be called the Masters while the speaker can be called the servant or slave.</p> <p>4) No, Madam and Dele have no right to treat them like that because all human beings have equal rights, the right to education, the right to good health, the right to eat and the right to a speech.</p>	Teacher appoints some students to do the correction on the blackboard.	Appointed students do the task as demanded by teacher.			
Evaluati on	<p style="text-align: center;">Writing:</p> <p>Writes five things you would do if someone takes you to a new country</p>	Teacher writes the task on the blackboard and	Learners copy			10 min

	<p>promising you a good job, ends up asking you to sell your body in order to refund the money he spent for you to travel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I will call for my parents to send me some money so that i can go back to my country. - I will look for a domestic job like care assistance and road cleaning. - I will do anything just to survive in order to send money to my family back home, because I am already abroad. - I will go to the police station and report him. - I will kill myself. <p><u>Homework</u> In not more than 100 words, write an</p>	<p>appoints students to do the task on the blackboard.</p> <p>Teacher corrects grammatical spellings and asks learners to copy in their exercise books.</p> <p>Teacher writes the</p>	<p>and do the task on the blackboard.</p> <p>Learners copy the corrected sentences in their exercise books as demanded by the teacher</p> <p>Learners copy</p>	<p>To elicit interaction and the right response from students.</p> <p>To follow-up the students.</p>	<p>Students/Students.</p>	
--	---	---	--	--	---------------------------	--

	article to you classmates on the topic “Equal rights and freedom”.	homework on the blackboard.	the homework in their exercise books.			
--	---	--------------------------------	---	--	--	--

GENERAL CONCLUSION

From our analysis, this work set out to prove the hypothetical contention that African's myth of the West is a pipe dream. Thus, a trip down memory lane can help in the re-invention of the self. It also proved that the African society and especially the government plays a great role in encouraging the young generation to believe in these myths as they fail in their promises. This is deeply rooted in Nigeria, Sudan and other African countries. And that the theme of migration handled in this novel can be integrated in an EFL classroom. In an attempt to vectorise our agreement, it was important first of all to identify the different Western myths that are evident in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. We explored the causes and effects of human migration through a socio-cultural and political point of view on Chika's protagonists. We proceeded by examining how one is being forced due to false beliefs to live in an uncomfortable situation though there are ways out. We also examined the various strategies employed by characters in their attempt in breaking free from societal and cultural constraints, thereby creating a space of their own. This led us to the investigation of the perception of how literature of migration can be introduced in the EFL and ESL classroom. As far as this was concerned, we sort to identify and discuss this using the Competence Based Approach of teaching vocabulary through literature. Then we proposed a lesson plan, wherein we used a dominant theme from *On Black Sisters' Street* in teaching the developments of speaking and writing skills to Upper Sixth Bilingue students.

During the track of our result, we realized that Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* presents characters that go through different ills caused either by their family members or by the society at large. Such frustration prevents them from believing in the African dream, a land where everything is possible, if and only if we look with our eyes wide open. We realized the fight for equal right is a very serious problem. This is because most of the characters that go through these frustrations are women and those who push them into choosing sex industry are mostly men. These ladies in the novel act at odds to their prescribed frustrations, though what they dive into is worse than the frustration offered them by their own societies. Other characters, due to their physical outlook, are perceived differently, regardless of the evils they cause. They include Dele, Polycap, Segun, Brother Cyrile and the numerous men who go in search for prostitutions in Belgium. Here, we see that men undermine women, as they see women nothing beyond their being sex tools. The author presents to us men expressing sexuality in different manners.

Further, we found out that this novel portrays ways through which the marginalized, oppressed or dominated characters can create an identity for themselves. Unigwe empowers these victimized characters either economically, intellectually or otherwise as a means of combating otherness. Thus, these characters are able to strive for redefinition and the creation of a space of their own - a space within which they can find authenticity and give more meaning to their lives.

In addition, we glanced at the efforts employed by Unigwe's protagonists and came to a conclusion that, not all that "glitters" is gold, as such, these women could have stayed in their respective countries in order for them to achieve their dream, instead of fighting back negatively. Though the money they got in Europe out of prostitution helped Joyce to finally set up a school back home and Ama opened her dreamed boutique in her homeland, it does not change the fact that they sold their pride to obtain that. Also, like Madam, Efe started trafficking more girls from Africa to Europe for prostitution and Sisi died. We see that, one has to be free but the freedom should be limited and caution so that we do not fall pray as these four women. This situation is a cause for concern. It is important to note that women in their freedom or new roles still behave violently because they believe they have not completely attained equality with men. We equally came to realize that this equality will rather be difficult to be completely attained by these women because of their vindictive nature. They use radical and harsh means even to their companions. They do this because by being vindictive, they are acting contrary to their own will. Due to globalization and the growing changes and advancement in modern technologies, such absurd categories have been brought to our door steps and its consequences are far reaching on our younger generation. Therefore, girls in particular as well as teachers and students must be aware of all these equality categories in order to find the best means of handling such a situation when they come up in their lives in future.

By way of contributing to literature, this work is an ongoing discussion on modern day slavery about the many young girls from certain parts of Africa and Cameroon in particular who fall prey to it. It exposes more myths that give African youths the impression that the West is a utopia. It also shows that by integrating literature of migration into EFL classroom, awareness could be raised on the pitfalls of clandestine migration.

Educators in particular and educational powers need to revise their course materials to include all sex and gender issues so that students are taken aback when confronted with different gender categories. This is because the emergence of illusions in African's minds about the Occident, especially in women is affecting our educational organization. This false

impression greatly affects the values of ethics of Africans. To resolve this crisis, the authority that be, first of all, have to be conscious of the hazards of such a choice to our younger generation and especially to our educational system. In this light, the government should re-examine the regulation and place sanctions on patriarchy which will lead to decent ruin while calling for acceptance and for equality that are customary for both men and women. Also, the leaders of school management should follow suit and apply the rule acknowledged by the administration, equal rights and education for all in order for both boys and girls to lead one another.

With Chika Unigwe's novel, *On Black Sisters' Street*, other researchers can endeavour to examine Western Myths in Cameroonian novels in a bid to compare and contrast their different visions of this phenomenon of immigration.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCE

Unigwe, Chika. *On Black Sisters' Street*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.

SECONDARY SOURCE

PUBLISHED WORKS

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (4th ed). New York: Norton and Co, 1979.

Albert Camus, Gustavo. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. France: Vintage, 1942.

Cuddon, Antony A. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Diamond, Linda and Linda Gutlohn. *Vocabulary Handbook*. California: Core Berkeley, 2006.

Farah, Nuriddin. *From a Crooked Rib*. London: Heinemann, 1970.

Habila, Helon Ngalabak. *Measuring Time*. New York: W. W. Norton 2007.

- - - *Waiting for an Angel*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

Lazara, Guillian. *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press 2005.

Leitch, Vincent B. et al, (ed)s. *The Northon Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. New York: WWW. Norton and Company, 2001.

Moslund, P. Sten. *Migration Literature and Hybridity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Murfin, Ross and Supryia Ray. *The Bedford Glossary Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1997.

Minas, Anne. *Gender Basics: Feminists Perspectives on Women and Men*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000.

Unigwe Chika. *The Phoenix*. Lagos: Farafina Publishers, 2007.

Walker, Cheryl. *Women and Gender in South Africa to 1945*. Clarmont: David Phillip Publisher, 1990.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. (ed). Carol H. Boston New York: Norton, 1972.

ARTICLES

Ayodele, Morocco- Clark. Rev. of *On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. *The Independent* 1 Feb. 2011: 4. Web. 23 May 2016.

Bernadine, Evaristo. "Rev. of *On Black Sister's Street* by Chikka Unigwe". *The Independent.co.uk*. 2 May 2011. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.

Cardoso, Fernando Henrique. "Development under Fire." *Mexico D. F.: Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales*, vol. 24 Mayo:1979. 85 - 125. *Pendelton*, 1997: 183.

Scott, A. Judith. "Developing Word Consciousness." *Essential Readings on Vocabulary Instruction*. Newark DE: International Reading Association, 2009: 106-117.

Ezeigbo, A. Theodora. "Reflecting the Times: Radicalism in Recent Female-Orientated Fiction in Nigeria." *Literature and Black Aesthetic*. Ibandan: Heinemann, 1990: 143-157.

Frank, Springer. *Migration and Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Ikheloa, R. Ikhide. "Nigerian Prostitution." Rev. of *On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. *Xokigbo.com* 29 Feb. 2012. Web. 23 May 2016.

Janice, G. Raymond. *Not a Choice, Not a Job: Exposing the Myth about Prostitution and Global Sex Trade*. Nebraska: Nebraska Press, 2013.

Kipling, Rudyard. "The Ballad of East and West." *A Victorian Anthology, 1837-1895*. (ed). Edmund Clarence Stedman. *Bartleby.com*. 1895. 1837-95. Web. 22 May 2016.

Kenzo, Mabilia. "Religion Hybridity and the Construction of Reality in Postcolonial Africa." www.academia.edu. 1 May 2014. Accessed 12 Jan. 2016.

Neba, Divine Che. "Recycling Myth and Revisionism in the Post-Colonial Discourse." *Culture without Borders. TRANS. Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*. No. 17/2008. 3.1 (2008): 17+. Web. 24 May 2016.

- Ozagula, Henry. "Black African Literature." *Rev. of On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. blackafricanliterature.blogspot.com. n. d. Web. 12 Feb. 2016.
- Price, Ruth. "Women's Fiction." *Rev. of On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. *Stars Reviews* 2 Jan. 2015: 4.5. Web. 20 May 2016.
- Rushdie, Salman. "Step Across This Line". *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction* 1992- 2002. London: Vintage, 2002. 406-42.
- Smith, Claiborne, ed. *Rev. of On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. *Kirkus Review* 1 Feb. 2011: 34. Web. 23 May 2016.
- Sylvester, Christine. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17.1 (1991): 165-70. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Tunca, Daria. "Redressing the 'Narrative Balance': Subjection and Subjectivity in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Afroeuropa: Journal of Afro-European Studies* (2001) 3.1: 1-18. Web. 19 Feb. 2016.
- Umez, Uche Peter. "Cries from the West." *Rev. of On Black Sisters Street* by Chika Unigwe. Northestreview.wordpress.com. 3 Mar. 2014. Web. 12 Jan. 2016.
- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Chika Unigwe: Biography n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2012.

DICTIONARIES

- Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Webster, Noah. *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*. London: G. & C. Merriam Co, 1913.