

**SEXUALITY AND THE BALANCE OF POWER IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET* AND TONY ALUM'S *IMAGES FROM A BROKEN MIRROR***

**A PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS (M.A) IN ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES**

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**MARCH 2018**

**TITLE PAGE**

**Sexuality and the Balance of Power in Chika Unigwe's *On Black***

***Sisters' Street* and Tony Alum's *Images from a Broken***

***Mirror***

## APPROVAL PAGE

This work has been read and approved as having met the standard required for the award of Master of Arts (MA) degree in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

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Head of Department

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Date

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project is an independent study carried out by Okafor, Michael Chiagozie with the registration number PG/MA/14/67580 of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and that this work has not been presented in part or full for the award of any diploma or degree in this or any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to all women in general and black women in particular caught up in the complications, controversies and conversations generated by the cultural interpretations of sexuality and the balance of power. The sun will shine on you!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of this work no doubt owes its creativity to God and his grace upon my life. In spite of all challenges, this work was completed. To him alone be all the glory! Special thanks go to my supervisor, Prof. Damian Opata, for his thoroughness and character in ensuring that this work came out in excellence and academic credibility.

My gratitude also is to the worldwide campaign on intersectional feminism that birthed this work. I have always been and will continue to be an advocate for gender parity and humanism. To all the libraries and research institutions that provided scholarly materials for this work, I say thank you.

My classmates and friends, especially Ude Chinedu, Edeh Innocent, Chizurum Ugwu (now Mrs) was very wonderful in their constructive criticisms and nudge for me to complete this work. Thank you. My lecturers in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, whose ingenious insights shaped my thinking in the course of this work, include Prof. N. F. Inyama, Mr F. U. Okoro, Mr Kelvin Amoke, Prof. I. Dieke, Dr F. O. Orabueze, Dr Mike Ezugu and Mr. Moses Melefa. Thanks for the academic grace you extended towards me!

How can I leave out my family, the Okafors'? Many thanks to my parents, Surv. and Dr. Mrs) Mike Okafor for their support and encouragement, and my siblings: Meme, Dumebi, Ebube, Soso and Bebe. You guys are the best! Thanks for your prayers and encouragement. The work is completed and out! To my church family, Glorious End Gospel Ministries, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, I say thank you for praying for and encouraging me. God bless you immensely!

To all these people and all others whose names have not been mentioned here in the interest of space, but who have contributed to the success of this work in one way or the other, I say, thank you!

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the concepts of sexuality and the balance of power as metanarratives in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Tony Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*. These texts belong to the growing literary oeuvre of the African Diaspora literary tradition, and owe interpretative allegiance to the ethno-cultural heritage of social texts, texts that are expressive of deep notions and axiomatic functionalities of socio-historical experiences: conventions and permutations. They chronicle chilling accounts of race, displacement, sexuality, culture and hormonal (power) trade narrated from the perspective of *difference*, and through the eyes of young Black females thrown together *by fate* in a battle for survival and individuality. Structured into five chapters, this research provides theoretical and critical basis for the narratives in the texts, narratives that reveal cultural and social symbols referencing sexuality and the balance of power. This work is written bearing in mind the discussions and theoretical arguments existing from research inquests into the position of women in the theorizing and contextualization of postcolonialism. To this end, the socio-theoretical orientation of Postcolonial Feminism is chosen as an investigative framework for this research. This orientation is driven by a recognition of the need to represent the *subaltern*, those suppressed female identities who are both victims of racial and gender preconceptions, and are caught in a mesh of expectations and frustrations in a bursting bid to survive the doldrums of economic privation.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Feminist studies of literary texts have given rise to critical considerations of sensitive areas of human life that were previously ignored by critics. One of such areas is the nature and complexity of human sexuality as a distinctive gendered construct. Sexuality as a cultural formative has weaved its way into the critical and thematic explorations of texts that speak about gender, race, culture and identity. For most feminist critics, sexuality is not just a biological composition, it is also a potent psycho-socio instrument that could be used to regulate and define the lives of women, for in the words of Harold Schneider, "the constituents of community, culture and ethnicity, and their interlinking to gender, sexuality and rights are very relevant and crucial to feminist discourses on female sexuality and rights in the African continent, especially the Sub-Saharan region" (40). This assertion is crucial to feminist discourse.

What this means is that for feminist discourse, sexuality is treated as a subset of the female gender, a characteristic she lives with in relationship to the cultural conventions, and possibly patriarchal norms of her social milieu. Sexuality also forms part of the discourse narrative and theorizing of postcolonialism. Sexuality is seen by postcolonial theorists as not just a gendered product, but as a cultural symbol for the exertion of power. They look beyond the hedonistic notions of sexuality to consider its symbolist interpretations and revelations on the dynamics of race, culture and power for the *sexes* involved. "With the bitter experience of colonialism and masculinity for the female folks came new definitions for sexuality and gender" (Ann Laura Stoler, 17)

To be male was to be the "brutish, oppressive and authoritarian" figure who took out his masculinity on the female at the slightest provocation, while to be female was to be the "passive,

docile and subservient" figure who kowtowed to the whims and caprices of her irreverent and irrepressible male. This created a power imbalance between the two *sexes* that prospered under the existing and prevailing patriarchal environment. Postcolonialism deepened this divide, for as Leith-Ross observed, "after colonization and independence, African societies continued to subject the colonial gender-sex identities to further pressures and constructions across the continent" (15). For Nkolika Ijeoma Aniekwu, "the postcolonial state remained largely patriarchal and unreconstructed, and in addition to reproducing the logic of colonial oppression, it formulated converging constructions of sexual identities" (35).

Sexuality is generally seen as the feelings and activities connected with a person's sexual desires, but by the form, order and impact of post-colonialism and modernism, it has added a new dimension in which it could be seen as a social construct on which racial and cultural identities can be formed and interpreted. With this interpretation of sexuality going beyond "the way in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings" (Rathus et al, 5) to the notions of identity and power, sexuality has become one of the discursive tools for interpreting the theme of race and cultural hegemony, especially in postcolonial texts. These texts, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Tony Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror* are analogous in their representations of race and culture and the convolutions that go with them. They are not just texts having sexuality as a metanarrative, but are also revelations on the power struggle that play out in the expressions and transactions of sexuality.

As a towering narrative in Diaspora writings and postcolonial literatures, sexuality and the balance of power share in the broad representations of the transcultural and obviously displaced individual trapped in the helplessness and pressure of his/her new settlement. For the Diaspora writer, the thematization of sexuality is a window to the larger experience of racism

and survival in a foreign land where you are pressured to *use what you have to get what you deserve, or pay what you owe*. Our texts exemplify this dilemma. Sex is presented as a means to control and subjugate the *other*, the colonized. Anne McClintock points out that Edward Said in his work, *Orientalism* had argued that "the superiorly strong position that the western male enjoyed was produced through the sexual subjection of the 'Oriental' woman which enabled the discourse about the 'Orient'" (77). According to Said, "this Orientalism took the perverse form of 'white male fantasy' that sexualized an Orient woman for the pleasure and possession of the Western power" (67). These are the issues confronting the Diaspora female trapped in the waywardness and recklessness of living at home, and the excesses and hate of her host's (new) land. The struggle to survive racial oppression, economic starvation and its uncertainties, and the gnawing pressure to submit one's body to be used is a critical existential discourse we encounter in our primary texts. The female characters are pressured to *use what they have to get what they need (economic assets to service their debts and be free)*, but at what price? In *On Black Sisters' Street*, we see that:

The women are not sure what they are to one another. Thrown together by a conspiracy of fate and a loud man called Dele, they are bound in a sort of unobtrusive friendship, comfortable with whatever little they know of one another, asking no questions unless they are prompted to, sharing deep laughter and music in their sitting room, making light of the life that has taught them to make the most of the trump card that God has wedged in between their legs, dissecting the men who come to them (men who spend nights lying on top of them or under them, shoving and fiddling and clenching their brown buttocks and finally [mostly] using their fingers to shove their own pale meat in) in voices loud and deprecating ... (17).

With this, we see the extent to which one's despair and helplessness could go searching for survival and providence. This aspect of sexuality that is "forced" (Michel Foucault, 163) is interpreted by some postcolonial feminist critics such as Audre Lorde as reflective of the helplessness and dependence of the economically stranded and psychologically fragmented female sex worker in the hands of her male patronage, whose body ritual she must endure in order to access the money he offers. This kind of narrative that speaks to the soul and experiences of the sexually *colonized* female is a distinguishing factor for Western and postcolonial feminist narratives on sexuality. To Aniekwu, "while Western feminists emphasize individual female autonomy and sexual rights, African counterparts are struggling with culturally 'accepted' forms of female subordination, gender inequity and inequality" (5).

This difference in views led to the rejection of mainstream feminism by feminists from other regions, especially postcolonial cultures of Africa, Asia, Latin America, amongst others. This marked the beginning of postcolonial feminism, "to cater for the specifics and singular thoughts of the postcolonial woman" (Lorde, 67). For Coomaraswamy, "African (and much of Third-World' feminism) owes its origins to different dynamics than those that generated Western feminism" (15). This research proposes as a thesis the expression of sexuality as sensual experiences and transactions that convey deep cultural psychologies and racial sentiments. To the African/postcolonial feminist critic, sexuality is a cultural symbol construing identity, and revealing the politics of control and oppression. In a colonized and oppressive environment, sex can take up functions as a means for exploitation and violence. Here as in most cases, the victim is the female and the perpetrator is the male.

Certain critics such as Foucault have used this victim/perpetrator' dialectic in describing the frictional relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. However, sex can also be

liberating and fulfilling, a means to independence and prosperity. Here, sex is transactional, a means of trade and economic value. Most displaced and disillusioned females in the Diaspora caught in the dark world of sex merchandising are sworn to fierce *madams* and agents who demand *returns* from them of every sex transaction they broker. This is the situation in our primary texts, where young females are shipped as sex slaves to Belgium and Italy. Their courageous efforts to livelihood and self-sufficiency from this risqué business are the energy that drives their stories.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

The notion of sexuality and the balance of power remains a constant critical framework for the flourishing of ideas on the politics of racial identities and gendered dichotomies. This research is an investigation into this notion, and what it means for the female characters in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*. Sexuality is explored in these texts not as a biological concept, but as a discourse formative opening up narratives revealing economic survival, gender control, and surprisingly psychological growth.

The central narrative in these texts is sexuality and the balance of power. However, here lies the problem, to what extent is this narrative a coordinating formative driving the entire gamut of the texts, and what is the perception of the female body in the texts as reported by the experiences of the female characters with the male figures? This perceptivity is crucial to the interpretation of the sexual narratives in the texts. It is the position of this research that the exalted status of sexuality in the texts is a symbolic remembering of the politics of colonialism, and the narratives it generated. This is investigated.

In these texts, the authors intelligently employ *sex* as a metaphoric canvass for painting graphically the horrifying brutalities of colonialism, and exploring the disillusionment and

frustrations that comes with independence and failed expectations. This metaphoric treatment of sex, though with adequate sensual representations creates a problem of interpretation and generalization, a dialectic that ponders on the humanity of the Diaspora environment that is oxymoronic in its offerings to foreigners, especially young desperate females, with a flesh worth paying for. This research interrogates this problem, providing clues on the typologies of sexual narratives contained in the texts.

Furthermore, researches into these narratives have not been thoroughly comprehensive in their analysis. As the literatures reviewed shows, sex is treated as a thematic element in the texts by most researchers. The lacuna therefore exists on the treatment of sex as a basic thematic element, and as a symbolic narrative revealing somber meditations on the conditions and perceptions of the black female in a postcolonial environment that employs sex as a weapon for colonizing and merchandizing her flesh. This gap is bridged in this research, as it provides theoretical and critical explanations on these ethno-social experiences. I would dare say that this work scores a first in the comprehensive treatment of *Sexuality and the Balance of Power* in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Tony Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This research has as a critical objective, the exploration of sexuality and the balance of power in the texts under study. The following research objectives are intended:

1. The study and interpretation of sexuality as a symbolic narrative in the texts
2. The x-raying of the different levels of power and its balance in the texts
3. The analysis of the ethno-historical connotations contained in the texts, as they reveal repressed and suppressed identities

4. The exposition of the linkages between the postcolonial and feministic frameworks contained in the texts
5. The comparison of the narrative and structural formatives that constitute difference as regarding sexuality and the balance of power in the texts.

#### **1.4 Significance/Importance of the Research**

This research is based on the sociological interpretation of literary texts that posits that "every text is a reflection of certain cultural values and social norms that form the contextual elements contained in the work" (Chinyere Nwahunnya, 34). This is expanded by Jefferson and Robey in their analysis where they observed that "a literary text must be regarded as the expression of the psychology of an individual, which in turn is the expression of the milieu and the period in which he lived and of the race to which he belong" (103). Based on this assertion on the sociological import of literary texts, this research is significant in four critical ways:

1. It contributes to the growing mass of critical studies on Diaspora writings within the contemporary African literary tradition.
2. It provides an enduring guide and referencing for further research on sexuality and the balance of power in related texts.
3. It offers an insight into the nature and conditions of living for the culturally displaced and economically challenged African female in the Diaspora.
4. It contributes to critical knowledge on the writings of Chika Unigwe and Tony Alum.



## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURES

This chapter contains a review of the literatures on sexuality and the balance of power in our research instruments, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*. It also includes a review of other works where the concepts of sexuality and the balance of power have been identified and explored.

### 2.1 Reviews on Sexuality and the Balance of Power in *On Black Sisters' Street*

Majority of literary studies on Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* have focused on the typologies of character found in the work, the questions of race and identity, and the conditions of women explored by the author. A few of these would suffice here. In the analysis of feminist critic, Margaret C. Koskei, the text is a "tale expressive of the oppression of women whereby men take advantage of female vulnerability upon realizing that they lack political and economic independence" (53). Commenting on the characters in the text, Chinelo Ezeh observes that

In Sisi, Unigwe presents a female character forced into prostitution as a result of economic instability and poverty. In Efe, we see a female character that undergoes abuse though with her consent as a result of poverty and lack of parental care and attention. In Alek/Joyce, we see a survivor of wartime atrocities, who come to Lagos with Polycarp, her lover to find life (25).

Ezeh's character study on the text cites socio-economic conditions as the reason for the choices the girls make. They accept offers into a dark world of sex commercialization with one focus on their minds: *Getting out of Poverty*. Poverty then becomes the rallying point for their work and sisterhood. *On Black Sisters' Street* is a sexual narrative, a narrative of sexploitation, trafficking and abuse. It is replete with stories of male dominance, female brutality, and psychological disillusionment. It tells the haunting story of four very different women who have left their

African homeland for the riches of Europe. Each night, Sisi, Ama, Efe, and Joyce stand in the windows of Antwerp's red-light district, promising to make men's desires come true - if only for half an hour. They open their bodies to strangers but their hearts to no one, each focused on earning enough to get herself free, to send money home or save up for her own future.

Precious Ime Idio in her critical work, *"Sex Slavery in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street"* considers the text as an investigation into the nature of sexual exploitation meted out against hapless Black females who are caught up in their imaginations of an Eldorado in a harsh cultural climate. The text as she analyzes in her thesis "basically examines the issue of sex slavery as a recurring phenomenon in the African society, and as well explores the nuances of sex slavery and its attendant effects on the victims" (3). Sex slavery is the enslavement of individuals for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

For Max Klamburg, "sex slavery is a particular form of enslavement which includes limitations on one's autonomy, freedom of movement and power to decide matters relating to one's sexual activity" (5). In her own study of *On Black Sisters' Street*, Florence Orabueze observes that "Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* captures the return of slavery and slave trade in the form of sex slavery which occurs either on the domestic scale or on transnational scale" (22). Going further, she opines that "sex slavery depersonalizes its victim and gives her a zero image, an image that is synonymous with Africa's image at home and abroad" (22). The depersonalization of the sex victim as she calls it is the hidden ambition of the assaulter or trafficker, who in most times is male.

From the viewpoint of these critics, the narrative of sexuality in *On Black Sisters' Street* - factored on the sexual trafficking and slavery located in the text. The purpose of this clandestine and ignoble trade is to exploit the women involved, and expose them to the perilous world of sex

merchandising, where they are treated as sexual items to be bargained and sold. This practice of sex merchandising is the reason the women are transported from their homelands, with or without any assurance of safety and providence. They simply lean on the 'hope' offered by their act of courage, a slender hope that offers an escape from the harsh economic and socio-political realities of their environments to a better clime, an environment offering options, though at great psychological and physiological price for survival and independence. How these tall dreams are realized or denied remains the central question in the text. In her own study on sexuality in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Charity C. Ukachi, writing on "*The Myth of Eldorado and Prostitution in Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street*", concludes that

Chika [sic] in her *On Black Sisters' Street* tells us a story of ourselves, a story of failed expectations, aborted ambitions, stillborn dreams, failed visions; a story of poverty, a story of exploitation and deprivation, a story of trafficking, a story of capitalism and its deleterious effects, a story of inhumanity, cruelty and brutality, a story of the tragic realities that bedevil Nigerian/African ladies who have gone to Europe in search of some Eldorado (2).

She places the narrative sequence in the text on the characters search for the Golden Fleece in Europe. Hence, the motivation to accept Dele's cavalier offer is the promise of a better life in Europe. How this promise is met or dashed drives the plot of the story. Going further in her analysis, Ukachi explains that

The girls go to Belgium with the passion and mission to mine the European gold, but they soon become disillusioned when they discovered that Europe in general and Belgium in particular is not the land of salvation from the poverty and hardship they are fleeing from their homelands (23).

Pessimistic in tone though, Ukachi highlights the conditions of the human experience contained in the text. This is an experience that is universal for females, especially the African, seeking for 'bliss' in European societies. This search comes with a high price, and is most times life-threatening. We see this play out in the Diaspora, where young African women are faced daily with the harsh realities of the consequences of their choice to leave their economically-challenged homelands for the 'green fields' of Europe.

These realities are outflows of the racial bigotry and gender stratifications coloring living and acceptance in the environment they find themselves. *On Black Sisters' Street* becomes a cultural metaphor for the life and struggles of the economically challenged and displaced individual, especially the trafficked female in the Diaspora. Sexuality is a narrative rope shared by a majority of Diaspora narratives. This is because of the cultural connotations it brings. These connotations are reflectional accounts of the struggles of the trafficked female who finds herself displaced, disorientated, and at the mercy of her fierce 'owners' whose economic and sexual demands she must meet or face deportation, or at precarious times, outright death, as is the case with Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Efe in *Images from a Broken Mirror* and Kizzy in Alex Haley's *Roots*.

Writing on the balance of power in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Shalini Nadaswaran observes that "the text reveals the economic, social and political factors that facilitate the oppression of women who are trafficked, and how Nigerian female characters challenge the conditions of their lives as trafficked women, subverting existing relations of power" (5). These existing power relations are influenced by prevailing metanarratives that place women beneath men as "weaker sex", an obvious manifestation of patriarchic setups and controls. By patriarchy we mean the "hierarchical system of social organization in which cultural, political, and economic structures

are controlled by men" (Lengermann and Wallace, 15). Most of the men presented in the text are ignoble, sexually exploitative, and Machiavellian in nature in their relations with the female characters. Their actions create the conflicts and narrative twists we find in the text. The characters who challenge these conditions as Nadaswaran observes are deliberate creations of the female writer, of which Chika Unigwe is a representative, who attempts "to rewrite the history of oppressed women through well-intentioned narratives and texts" (Helen Chukwuma, 101). For such women, literature is seen "as a major avenue of self-expression ... in the on-going quest for new gender myths and collective self-retrieval" (Mary Modupe, 42). In confronting the issues of power in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Helen Thompson notes that

In all her writings, Chika Unigwe's engagement in social justice is evident. The writer is a vehement supporter of Nigerian women and an outspoken critic of Nigerian government which is evident in her writings. From her critique of marriage, she believes that marriage is an institution that facilitates the patriarchal attitudes that shelters abusive husbands and the enslavement of women" (3).

What this means is that the text makes a vocal appeal against the oppression and exploitation of women, either as workers or as courtesans. It maintains as a matter of conviction that "one of the overriding factors that aids in the proliferation of sex slavery is the belief that the lives of women and girls are expendable" (Ezeh, 29).

Nadaswaran is of the view that "immense poverty and desire for survival is one of the key factors apart from global deprivation and discrimination that augmented the exploitation of women through the sex trade" (2). Poverty and the need to escape from its bitter *fangs* becomes the *raison d'etre* for participating in the sex trade for the women involved. Sex therefore becomes an economic asset, the passport to El-Dorado, a world of psychological freedom and

economic independence. In his discourse on sexuality in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Remi Akujobi investigates the reasons for the unholy movement of women and girls from Africa to Europe. He explores the 'transiting process' for Sisi as she first arrives at the Zwartzusterstraat, the house of passion and dreams, to becoming independent at the end of the narrative. He identifies that "stigmatization stemming from border crossing seems to affect the psyche of these trafficked persons" (1).

In his analysis, the lives of the four women involved in the narrative are shaped by the cultural shock and disillusionment they face upon arrival in Belgium. When confronted with the realities of their job description, they blurt out in despair and helplessness. Sisi, the principal character, recounts her first moments on the job:

This is not me. I am not here. I am at home, sleeping in my bed. This is not me. This is not me. This is somebody else. Another body. Not mine. This is not me. This is somebody else. Another body. Dieter got up and motioned for her to follow him. This is not me. This is not me. This is a dream. But I need the money. Return to Lagos? Can't. Won't (115).

She experiences an existential conflict, a psychological dilemma that belabors her functionality as an individual in such repressive and repugnant environment. It is this dilemma that becomes the thriving thesis of Akujobi's work, *"Glee, Craving and the Dilemma of the Trafficked Nigerian Woman: Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street in Perspective."*

For Nicola Barr, the text is a "rich material for a novel, with its impressive array of lost, lonely women with a severe case of culture shock seeking solace in each other" (1). Going further, he observes that the text is also presented as an "account of lonely prostitutes battling

against the world, and of male figures that are either abusive or weakly passive figures that live off the sexual pleasures they derive from the hapless prostitutes they exploit" (Barr, 3).

In summary, the review of literatures on sexuality and the balance of power in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* shows that the narrative of sexuality in the text is factored upon the desire for a better, free and independent life, and the price to be paid to attain that. It also reveals the age long objectification of the female body by the male. For the main characters in the text, Sisi, Efe, Joyce, and Ama, this price is the employment of their womanhood, what the novel recounts as "the trump card wedged between their legs" (17) for the servicing of the sexual fantasies of the men they must meet. Their reward is the pecuniary gifts they get at the end of each tryst. In the text, sex is not given as an expression of desire, it is sold (*as an economic asset*), forced (*as an exertion of power*), and exploited (*as an object to be ravaged*), a "sex that is taken from repressed and oppressed identities" (Michel Foucault, 3).

*On Black Sisters' Street* therefore provides for readers and critics alike a fictional account of the psycho-social experiences of the young African female trapped in her own desires for a better life. Motivated by a desire to escape poverty and social malaise, she is lured into trafficking to a world of debauchery, sexploitation, uncertainty and hardship. If she survives, she succeeds. If she succumbs, she fails. We see this play out in the relationship between the four women (Sisi, Efe, Joyce, and Ama), Dele, their inglorious pimp, and Madam their malevolent benefactor in the text. The novel provides an insight into what it means to live as a disadvantaged female trafficked to a foreign land with no options other than using what is wedged between your legs (*your bottom power*) to survive. This creates a defiance and power imbalance for the female characters involved.

## **/2.2 Reviews on Sexuality and the Balance of Power in *Images from a Broken Mirror***

*Images from a Broken Mirror* is a narrative text written by the Nigerian writer, Tony Alum. Published in 2008, this novel captivates readers and critics as they follow the story of Efe from a struggling African immigrant to a popular and successful sex worker in the red-light districts of Porta Pallazo, a suburb hideout for African immigrants where everything from sex to drugs sells in Italy. Though sharing the same sexuality trope with Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, it presents further extensions on the Diaspora debate. Questions of racism, cultural oppression and subordination are part of the narrative structure of the text. Despite being published in 2008, there are little or no critical works or reviews on sexuality in the text to the best of my knowledge as at the time of writing this. This would likely be the first in this regard to study sexuality and the balance of power as a narrative in the text.

In considering the social import of sexuality in the text, and its reflections on culturality and shared communal experiences, Iyay Kimoni observes that the pen of the African writer burns with the zeal to capture the dislocations and disequilibrium existing in his society, of which the conflicts arising from sexuality (my thought) is central. He argues that

African literature is this literary manifestation of Blacks, in European or other languages, which fought colonialism violently, expressed its anger over the dislocation of the African society and which painfully strives to rebuild the equilibrium of African personality on new foundations, through dialogue between the elements of African culture and the contribution of the world to technology (11).

This patriotic fronting for the African writer finds ample expression in the work of Tony Alum. His text, *Images from a Broken Mirror*, captures the dialectics of sexuality as it involves the central characters involved. This point is re-echoed by the literary website, *author House* in its



review of the text, where it observes that the "author uses the novel in a dialectal manner to x-ray the multifarious conflicts that dovetail to make life for the African immigrant in Italy a nightmare" (1).

In summary, literary reviews on sexuality and the balance of power in this text are non-existent, despite all the sexual narratives, and the tropes of Diaspora narratives it contains, which includes, rootlessness, displacement, border-crossing, transculturalism, migration and disillusionment. Hopefully, this gap would be bridged by subsequent researchers. As a guide for interested scholars, this text shares thematic similarities with Alex Haley's *Roots*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americana*, Kaine Agarry's *Yellow-Yellow*, amongst others within the Diaspora tradition, and so opens itself to comparative and theoretical analysis. This research to the best of the knowledge of the researcher is a major critical investigation into the text.

### **2.3 Reviews of Sexuality and the Balance of Power in Other Texts**

In addition to the above reviews on the primary texts, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Images from a Broken Mirror*, studies on sexuality and the balance of power have been conducted by other literary researchers in other texts. These studies share a seeming similarity in content and context with this research that is founded on the ethno-human experience of sexuality and the balance of power they explore in the texts they interpret. In "*Sexuality and the Balance of Power in The Canterbury Tales*," Sarah C. Zumdahl investigates Chaucer's views on sexuality. She writes,

In my estimation Chaucer portrays, in terms of sexuality, two extremes in the balance of power between masculine and feminine: "The Reeve's Tale" [RvT] incorporates a woman who, in effect, pays her rapist for violating her, while the Wife of Bath tells a

tale in which a knight consciously concedes all his masculine power to a woman. "The Miller's Tale" [MiIT] mediates between these two extremes, but it is also an example of how masculine and feminine realize quality of control in a sexual relationship ... I will argue that in Chaucer's estimation, male/female power in a fictional, yet non-ideal world can achieve equal balance only when sex is "natural" - a state loosely defined by Alfred David as being too obsessed with physical gratification and domination, nor too fixated on some goal apart from the pleasure of sex itself (3-4).

Her postulations present a descriptive analysis of sexuality as encountered in *The Canterbury Tales*. Another critic, Innocent John offers a similar research into *The Canterbury Tales*. This investigation observes that

Chaucer represents 'human sexuality'<sup>1</sup> as a tool for rebellion and joviality in *The Canterbury Tales*. Contrary to subservient roles accorded women and sexuality in the medieval era and throughout the history world over, Chaucer presents his sexes in the light of their experiences rather than the received authority of the patriarch (5).

Chaucer presents three perspectives to sex as identified in his work, sex as an act of power, sex as an expression of pleasure and rebellion, and sex as a commodity for exchange. What is unique and engaging of Chaucer's treatment of sexuality is the fact that the period he wrote in was an era controlled by the dictum and dictates of the Church. Their views regarding sex were puritanical. For example, as John further recounts on the Church's control,

Nevertheless, the most gruesome superstitious beliefs about human sexuality are the ones propounded by the decree of the church. The church controlled the days on which it is supposed to be safe to have sexual intercourse between couples. Such days

as Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays considered as fast days for the saints, and also during lent. Women are not also allowed to engage in sexual intercourse with their husbands during menstruation, pregnancy or the first forty days after delivering a baby. The church also decided what sexual positions are considered sinful and the one that is acceptable. Jaxon argues that a German bishop, Albertus Magnus, came up with a list of five sexual positions that are likely to send one to hell: side-by-side, sitting, standing, and a tergo (from behind) sexual positions. While only missionary position is considered safe for couples as it allows for easy procreation than the other positions. This total suppression of true human sexual identity brought rebellion through diverse ways. These diverse sexual deference is amongst the motives behind Chaucer's Tales (4-5).

This ecclesiastical view on sex meant that sex was solely for procreation, and not for pleasure. So, when in *The Canterbury Tales* we are presented with a virile character as 'The Wife of Bath', who engages in sex freely, and for the pleasure she derives in it, we see a cultural clash between Chaucer's art and the Church's ordinance.

In "*Sex (uality) as Narrative Trope in Post-Independence Nigerian Fiction*," Oluwole Coker, using Abimbola Adunni Adelalnin's *under the Brown Rusted Roof* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* as investigative tools, espouses the pre-eminence of sex and sexuality discourse in Post-independent Nigerian fiction. Expositing on the choice of the novels in the discussion of sexuality in the novels, he writes that

The novels are selected because they are written during the post-independence period and manifest tendencies for engaging socio-historical dynamics through metaphors of sex in their narratives ... by developing sex and sexual discourse explicitly, the writers

effectively connect with post-independence decadence. In addition, through a deliberate deconstruction of what hitherto was considered improper in African fiction, the representative texts confirm an evolving stylistic and rhetorical idiom identifiable with post-independence Nigerian fictional corpus. Sex is thus foregrounded as central to individual identity formation as well as a central social force crucial in negotiating and defining power relations (1-2).

In his article, "*Hegemonic Masculinity: Sexploitation in Amma Daeko 's Beyond the Horizon*," Romanus Nwoma examines through masculinity, gender relations that induce sexual exploitations of women in Daeko's *Beyond the Horizon*. He writes on his discovery that

The female characters have been represented as victims of the social and cultural forces that reinforce patriarchy and undermine the interest of the women. Capitalist motivations become an irresistible alibi, leading to commercialization of sex; a conspiracy and a gang-up against the culture that nurtures these characters. Amma Darko reveals in her novel the breadth and depth of sufferings of women in the hands of men whose misguided sense of authority and control drag them along the paths of mundane thoughts and actions, and who appear irreverent to the customs and traditions that hold their society together (1).

His emphasis on gender relations remains critical to any discourse on sexuality and the balance of power because of the sexes involved. The struggle for superiority, independence and control remains a deciding factor to sex and sexuality.

In "*Calixthe Beyala and the Politics of Sexuality: The Example of 'Asse'ze fA/ricaine*" feminist critic, Cazenave Odile maintains that Beyala's novel "marks a new step in the author's elaboration of a new sexual ethics" (253). She observes that in this work,

The author highlights the resilient modes of behaviours ingrained both in men and women that persist against any radical change. In it, Beyala points out the limitations of a new sexual ethics and she voices both disillusionment and doubt about a possible improvement of the condition of the African woman on her terms (253-254).

What this treatise means is that for Beyala, women must rise to confront the prevailing attitudes against their sex and development. In her works, she presents an alternative, though radical orientation of sex to a different Africa (an awakened generation) through a renewed definition of gender roles. In another of her work, *Femme nue Femme noire* (translated Naked woman Black Woman), she presents a sexuality that is jauntily unproductive and magisterially creative. As critic Albin Michel observes on this paradoxical sexuality,

As an example, the levirate [the law by which a man marries his brother's widow] imprisons grandmothers as bedfellows for younger males, but even in an 'artificial situation' like this, the 'withered old women' reinvent their relationships in pro-creative and re-creative dimensions" (3).

Further studies on sexuality and the balance of power reveal that women are not the only victims of repressed sexuality and exploitations. Men are also victims. Gay criticism gives us an insight into the struggles of men who are of the *other* sex. Their struggles come to limelight, especially in Africa where we are confronted with a traditional setup that has no regard for alternative sexualities. Homosexuality is frowned at and meted with heavy punishments in most countries in Africa. Homosexuals feel the pangs of heterosexual women struggling to protect and preserve their sex from oppressive patriarchy forces of war, rape and marriage.

Jude Dibia, a contemporary Nigerian novelist has taken up the discourse of homosexuality and alternative sexualities in his works, *Unbridled*, *Walking with Shadows*, and

*Blackbird*, in order to show how writers challenge hegemonic ways of viewing sexuality. His novels give humanity to the struggles of homosexuals in repressive and oppressive societies that have no regard for their sexual orientation. His writings focus on sexual deviances. Commenting on this, Ifenyinwa Genevieve Okolo in her essay, "*Sexual Deviance in Jude Dibia's Novels*" observes that "Dibia's representations of contexts of sexual deviance deconstruct the notion of a 'pure'<sup>1</sup> African devoid of sexual deviance, providing other ways of interpreting 'deviations' (1). What this holds is that sexual differences are common to both sexes: heterosexual women struggling with their identities in the face of repression, and homosexual men struggling with acceptance and the explanation of their 'weird'<sup>1</sup> taste. The key to solving these issues are balance, love and acceptance. Each should be given ample expressions for their identities and orientations, so long as it is within the boundaries of order, respect and responsibility.

In conclusion, it has been observed that sexuality and the balance of power are twin concepts that function as sociological manifestations of the gender influences, variations and conflicts that exist in society. The notions of patriarchy vs. matriarchy, dependence vs. independence, and the politics of desire remain hotspots for the fertilization of ideas that seek to investigate the power conflicts and balances in society. Our primary texts, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Images from a Broken Mirror* are in the light of these reviews meditations on the nature and directions of power struggles in a racialised and sexualized environment such as we find in Porta Pallazo and Zwartzusterstraat, where women are valued on the basis of their sexual prowess and bargaining power; an environment where their bodies are commoditized for pleasure, control and exploitation. What we find in this text however, remains a symbolism referencing the external realities and transactions of the global sex trade (sex tourism, trafficking, abuse and pornography) where women are objectified and commoditized.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework and research methodology employed in arriving at the textual interpretations in the research.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

This section of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework that has been employed in this study. The framework developed for this research is *Postcolonial Feminist Theory*. However, before discussing the concerns of the Postcolonial Feminist Theory it is imperative to get familiarized with the mainstream post-colonial theory.

#### Postcolonial Literary Theory

Postcolonial literary theory is a literary interpretation of post-colonialism (a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies). It aims at understanding the literatures of formerly colonized cultures, exploring the cultural and existential themes they connote. The most relevant concern of postcolonial thought has been the decentralization of Western culture and its values. Its main theoretical concern is the rejection of colonial representation in 'master narratives' (the universalizing Western modes of thought) held by the West, and the expansion of the literary canon to include the literatures of the colonized.

Edward Said, the post-colonial theorist is believed to have developed the essence of post-colonial theory mainly in his books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Said's argument was that the 'West' juxtaposed themselves against the other cultures that it came in contact with during its imperial expansion. These cultures were attributed the negative representation of being the 'Other' to the western norm. For postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha,

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third-World<sup>1</sup> countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geographical divisions of east and west, north and south. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nation, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity (271).

The most important writers among postcolonial theorists are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak. Homi Bhabha is essentially interested in exploring non-canonical texts which reflect the margin of society in a postcolonial world. He explores the subtle interrelations between cultures, the dominant and the subjugated. Of special interest to him is the way in which subjugated races mimic their subjugators. These ideas are explored especially in the volume *The Location of Culture* (1994).

He argues that the interaction between the colonizer and colonized leads to the fusion of cultural norms, which confirms the colonial power but also, in its mimicry, threatens to destabilize it. This is possible because the identity of the colonizer is inherently unstable, existing in an isolated expatriate situation. The colonizer's identity exists by virtue of its difference. It materializes only when in direct contact with the colonized. Gayatri C. Spivak is a feminist postcolonial theorist. She is best known for her essay; "*Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988)" She is known for her cultural and critical theories that challenge the "legacy of colonialism" in the way



readers engage with literature and culture. She criticizes Western feminism especially for focusing on the world of white, middle-class heterosexual concerns. She is also interested in the role of social class - the Subaltern: referring to all the lower levels of colonial and postcolonial society: the unemployed, the homeless, subsistence farmers, etc.

For M.A.R. Habib, "postcolonial literature and criticism arose both during and after the struggles of many nations in Africa, Asia, Latin America (now referred to as the "Incontinent" rather than the "third-world"), and elsewhere for independence from colonial rule" (738). Robert Young, in his analysis concludes that "Postcolonialism continues to derive its inspiration from the anti-colonial struggles of the colonial era. Anti-colonialism had many of the characteristics commonly associated with post-colonialism such as "Diaspora, transnational migration and internationalism" (2). Commenting further, Young notes that

Postcolonial criticism has embraced a number of aims: most fundamentally, to reexamine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized; to determine the economic, political, and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonized peoples and the colonizing powers; to analyze the process of decolonization; and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination, and the articulation of political and cultural identities (11).

It is now established that postcolonial literary theory evolved as a literary interpretation of the growing postcolonial theorization of the late 60's and 70's. Literary texts were analyzed as ethno-historical tools for discovering and understanding the dialectics of cultural forms, and the politics of power, possession, colonialism and exploitation.

## Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Postcolonial feminism emerged through feminist historical research. Maitrayee Chaudhuri argues that it laid the foundations for feminist theorizing. It was while South-Asian feminists re-evaluated the constructions of gender and sexuality in colonial and anti-colonial discourses that possible agendas for post-colonial feminisms emerged (Loomba and Lukose, 4). Postcolonial feminism is a form of feminism that developed as a response to the fact that feminism seemed to focus solely on the experiences of women in Western cultures. Postcolonial feminism seeks to account for the way that racism and the long-lasting political, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism affect non-white, non-Western women in the postcolonial world. Several concerns and agendas have since been discussed and analyzed by post-colonial feminist theorists such as Mohanty, Spivak, Loomba, McClintock, etc.

Chandra Mohanty Talpade is critical about the hegemonic narratives of the West that box the Black woman in the mould of 'universal feminism'. Refuting this monostylous, and definitely biased view, she argues in her influential essay, "*Under Western Eyes*" (1991) that

Much Western feminist writing about Third-World<sup>1</sup> women 'discursively colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the 'Third-World<sup>1</sup>, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular Third-World Woman<sup>1</sup> - an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse (53).

She raises the issue of homogenizing of 'post-colonial/third world woman' into a singular group that 'Western Feminist Scholarship' has often found itself engaging into. Mohanty has critically pointed out that the empowerment of marginalized 'Third-World women' and their struggles of

resistance against the patriarchal society that they exist in, are hindered by the 'western white middle-class feminist' ideologies. She further states that

It is this discursive colonization that the 'western feminist discourse' engages in, while analyzing the historical and material differences in the lives of the 'Third-World' women, thereby constructing an arbitrarily put together image of a homogenous category of a 'Third-World woman' (61).

She observes that the view of the 'Third World woman' depicts them as "mere victims of traditions, religion and male control that exist within the developing country's context" (Mohanty 65). She further argues that "these characterizations conjured up by the eyes of the western feminists fail to pay attention to the differences and the history of their subjects' surroundings" (62).

Postcolonial feminist theory interprets the conditions of women in postcolonial cultures and literary texts. In the words of postcolonial scholar, Dr. Ritu Tyagi,

Postcolonial feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations. It concentrates on construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers. The postcolonial feminist critics raise a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of representation of gender (45).

Feminist theorists have been vague and generalistic in their report and writings on postcolonial women. They fail to take into account the differences and challenges of the postcolonial woman, who fights on two fronts: racism (*she is black, or at least not white*), and gender (*she is a*

woman). Commenting on this misrepresentation of Third-World<sup>1</sup> women by Western feminists, Tyagi points out that

They (Third-World<sup>1</sup> women) suffer at the hands of Western feminists from the colonizer countries who misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their "sisters" (46).

Postcolonial theorists on the other hand have neglected women. Commenting on this, Tyagi again observes that

While postcolonial theorist struggles against the maiden colonial discourse that aims at misrepresenting him as inferior, the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. She suffers from "double colonization" (a term coined by Kirsten Hoist Peterson and Anna Rutherford and refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy). She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the colonizer, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses (45).

McClintock writes against the privileging of the male in postcolonial works. In one of her essays, *"The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-colonialism"*, she writes:

The term "Post-colonialism" is prematurely celebratory and obfuscatory in more ways than one. The term becomes especially unstable with respect to women. In a world where women do two-thirds of the world's work, earn 10 percent of the world's income, and own less than 1 percent of the world's property, the promise of "post-

colonialism" has been a history of hopes postponed. It has generally gone unremarked that the national bourgeoisies and kleptocracies that stepped into the shoes of "post-colonial progress", and industrial "modernization" have been overwhelmingly and violently male. No "post-colonial" state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state. Not only have the needs of "post-colonial nations" been largely identified with male conflicts, male aspirations and male interests, but the very representation of "national" power rests on prior constructions of gender power (634).

She identifies postcolonial feminism as a feminization of postcolonial thought. Not only is the theory a break from the generalizations of feminism, it is also a platform for giving voice to the oppressed female in postcolonial discourses. In her critically acclaimed book, *Imperial Leather* (1995), she (McClintock) exquisitely charts the progress of the postcolonial world in respect to gender and gender agency. Her book outlines the detrimental effects of women's exclusion from the achievements of postcolonial activists and scholars.

Of course, she explains, there is more work to be done, both to achieve a truly postcolonial world and to achieve gender equity within that world. Her work participates in a conversation about the relationship between postcolonialism and feminism, one that Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-Me Park, authors of *"Postcolonial Feminism / Postcolonialism and Feminism,"*<sup>1</sup> consider not merely a variety of postcolonialism or feminism but instead "an intervention that is changing the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies" (53). Conventional female-focused narratives often marginalize women as well, creating a detrimental cycle of actual and narrated marginalization, as re-presentations mimic lived experience. It is

important to note that the notions of sexuality and power for the African woman are different for the White woman. Commenting on this difference, Aniekwu observes that

Western feminists are often troubled that African women take their reproductive roles too seriously, celebrate their ability to give birth, and refuse to subordinate their biological roles to other roles within society. This pro-natal aspect of African culture is reflected in the fact that in many parts of the continent, African women still bear five or more children while being economically active (6).

What this means is that postcolonial feminists reject the Western hegemonic notions of womanhood. They project the cultural distinctiveness that separates the Black woman as a victim of racism, displacement and sexual control. Critical to postcolonial feminist critics is the "notion of voice and identity" (Chris Weedon, 13). Writing on this, Spivak in her influential essay, '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*' (1988) in which she analyses "the relations between the discourses of the West and the possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman" (271), observes that

Reporting on, or better still, participating in, anti-sexist work among women of colour or women in class oppression in the 'First-World' or the Third-World' is undeniably on the agenda. We should also welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist-subject constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever (295).

Though concluding on a pessimistic tone for the subaltern, her treatise is apt in describing the racial and oppressive colorations that face the Black woman. For Spivak, a postcolonial lens

allows feminists to engage with and speak to the subaltern historically muted subject, instead of just listening to or speaking for them; this enables a postcolonial intellectual to then unlearn female privilege. This systematic unlearning according to Spivak, "involves learning to critique the Post Colonial discourse with the best tools it can provide, and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized" (267). A defining characteristic of feminist postcolonial literary studies is "its commitment to the analysis of history and social specificity and the goal of linking analyses of literary texts to broader social relations" (Weedon, 286). Postulating on this critical tool for interpreting postcolonial literatures, and its necessity, Margaret Walters writes:

There is also an increasing recognition that, whereas Western feminists have struggled against sexism, and against social and political inequalities, women in the "Third- World" have had to confront additional and even more intractable problems. They often have to combat sexism in the form of deep-rooted local beliefs and practices, to do with class, caste, religion, and ethnic biases. In some countries, their battle with these issues has been combined with, and sometimes complicated by, a struggle for the establishment of democratic government and for the most basic freedoms (118).

One would ask, what is the relevance of this theoretical stance to the research in exploration? Its relevance lies in the fact that analyzing Diaspora texts from the standpoints of colonized and racialised identities requires a unique cultural theory that will take into account the various "contextual elements" (Olusola Afolayan, 15) contained in the texts. These elements to postcolonial feminists are critical to the understanding of such texts.

The choice of postcolonial feminist theory is to employ its framework and philosophy in our discussion of sexuality and the balance of power in the texts. The theory provides accurate

cultural and gender based foundations for our analysis. These are women of colour (the women in our texts) hounded by racism and masculinity. A unique interpretive theory is needed to account for their struggles and experiences in their postcolonial environments, something the mainstream postcolonial and feminism theories may not represent well, for their undue emphasis on the *male, cultural dislocation, and feminine generalizations* that exclude the uniqueness of the woman of *colour*. Postcolonial feminist theory not only provides a veritable framework for discussing this study, it interprets its textual elements as a cultural study on the life and living conditions of the oppressed Black female in the Diaspora.

Postcolonial feminist theory is an interpretation focusing on *alternative subjectivities*. It originated as a critique of feminist theorists in developed countries. The critique points out the universalizing tendencies of mainstream feminist ideas and argues that women living in non-Western countries are misrepresented. Postcolonial feminism argues that by using the term "woman" as a universal group, women are then only defined by their gender and not by social class, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Postcolonial feminists also "work, to incorporate the ideas of indigenous and other Third World feminist movements into mainstream Western feminism. When it comes to Post-Colonial feminist theorizing, much of their feminist scholarship developed during the early 1980s which emerged as a reaction to the dominant ideas and modes of theorizing of the 'Western' feminist discourse. It was from here that "notions of subjectivity and cultural contexts were pitted against the ideas of 'universalizing theory" (Loomba and Lukose, 15).

*On Black Sisters' Street* and *Images from a Broken Mirror* no doubt are texts mirroring feminist and postcolonial imports. Postcolonial feminist theory provides the needed cultural framework for interpreting these texts, taking into cognizance the dialectics of race, sexuality



and power it holds for the postcolonial woman. It serves as a bridge between the universalizing feminist concerns of feminism, and the reductionistic cultural concerns of postcolonialism, emphasizing on the unique challenges, specificities and battles of the woman of colour trapped in a precarious environment where *sex* and *money* rule; an environment where survival at any cost is the watchword. For the main characters in these narratives, "the trump card wedged in between their legs" (*On Black Sisters' Street*, 17) is their passport to *El Dorado*. The fear of poverty drives them far into a world where they would never remain the same again.

This research agrees with McClintock's assertion that "the global militarization of masculinity and the feminization of poverty have thus ensured that women and men do not live "post-coloniality" in the same way, or share the same singular "post-colonial condition" (634). In Chapter 4, we would see how this divide plays out, influencing characterization and meaning in the texts.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

Olusola Afolayan's contextual interpretive model is adopted as a methodology for this research. His model is used as a framework for the critical interpretation of the research instruments, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*. This interpretive model focuses on the analysis of the textual and contextual elements featured in texts. In analyzing his model, Afolayan observes that "the literary art, especially African and Diaspora works bears certain contextual elements that aids in their interpretation" (15). By contextual elements, he refers to those "extra-linguistic forms and mythic patterns that create cultural symbols that reveal meaning" (15). These meanings act as clues for interpretation and analysis.

This methodology is adopted bearing in mind the theoretical orientations of the postcolonial feminist theory that lends credence and aesthetic relevance to contextual

explications. Theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Chris Weedon, Mohanty Chandra, and Audrey Lorde have employed contextual explication in their analysis. For Weedon, "a critical interpretation focusing on the textual and contextual elements in the work is critical to unveiling the aesthetic and symbolic meanings contained in the work" (75). This is the path taken in this research. We would be analyzing critically the narratives of sexuality and power in the texts, exploring what they hold for and reveal about the women involved who are the expendables.

Postcolonial feminism is primarily concerned with the deplorable plight of women in postcolonial environments. When applied to literary studies, they interpret postcolonial texts to discover and understand the conditions and experiences of women that keep them at the mercy of patriarchal and racial structures. As a literary theory, it adopts a sociological interpretation of literature in its analysis, one that takes into consideration the contextual elements weaved into literary texts. In this interpretation, the literary art is analyzed as an extension and expression of the conventions in society. Its narratives become a miniature representation of life as seen and encountered in the external human environment outside the text. The text therefore is seen as a conveyor and documentation of experiences that bear plausibility with the external social space of humanity. Our primary texts are analyzed along these lines, revealing sexual narratives that undermine, denigrate and regulate the lives of the female characters.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the primary texts are critically examined as narratives referencing discourses on sexuality and the balance of power. The focus here is to interpret these texts along the framework of postcolonial feminism, showcasing the views and interpretations on sexuality, the balance of power, and the place of women they contain. In encountering the texts, it is pertinent to note that the discourses on sexuality they espouse anchors on the conflicts and experiences sourced from the characterization of the female characters. The behavioral modes to which these women are cast provide the narrative templates for the discussion of sexuality and the balance of power.

Culturally and socially, the female body has been objectified, commercialized and symbolized as a recurring metaphor for pleasure, procreation and exploitation. In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*, we find that the discussions and encounters of sexuality and the balance of power rest on three realities:

- the objectification of the female body
- the commoditization and commercialization of the female body
- the symbolization of the female body

Under these three notions, the discussion of this chapter is directed.

### 4.1 The Objectification of the Female Body

In its literal definition, objectification means viewing someone as an object, an image of (for) admiration and fixation. To objectify is to see something or somebody as an idea, a concept, or a representation of one's assumptions and interests. Taken from the position of our study, objectification reduces a significant other (individual) to an image, a monolithic object that answers strictly to perceptible meanings. This reduction strips such an individual of value, dignity and decency. The objectification of the female body is the reduction of the female sex to

a mere object or tool for pleasure. In postcolonial feminist thought, the objectification of the female body is fallout of a masculine imagination that romanticizes about the sexual conquering of female flesh. The female body becomes a ground for erotic and cultural contest and conquest. As postcolonial subjects fighting the twin challenges of racial and gender imbalances, women of color are concerned with the negative imaginization of their bodies by their male folk. This masculinist imagination sees women as exhaustible items for cultural subjugation and erotic pleasures. Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking work "*The Second Sex*" is in no small part predicated on this concern. She explores the idea that women are mere objects for men's manipulation, and not, themselves, agents in the world - even if they are in their own life.

The female body has long been idealized, objectified and fetishized across cultures the world over. The perception of women as sexual beings is the thriving thrust for the objectification of the female body. For S.L. Bartky, "sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire" (75). This is the unwritten motivation behind the flourishing of prostitution as the world's oldest profession. Our texts, *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Images from a Broken Mirror* are centrally themed on prostitution, and its effect on the lives involved. Women are accepted into prostitution on the basis of their sexual 'assets' and prowess. Hear Dele, the infamous pimp in *On Black Sisters Street* making a proposition to Sisi:

If you wan' comot from dis our nonsense country, come see me, make we talk," he continued loudly ... I get connections. 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. Every month I send gals to Europe. Antwerp. Milan.

Madrid. My gals dey there. Every month, four gals. Sometimes five or more. You be fine gal now. *Abi*, see your backside, *kail* Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest *nyanshl* Make dem come here, come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for chest, omo, how you no go fin' work?" He fixed his eyes, beady and moist and greedy, on her breasts (20-25).

Sisi's passport to livelihood is the commercialization of her body. Dele's expected profit is based on what he perceives as her marketable assets. The marketability of the female body is a turning point in the sex trade. Prostitution itself is almost always seen as a way of objectifying the prostitute, especially if she is a sexual slave, or is being pimped out like the girls in our texts. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the objectification of the female body is made a telling narrative in the prostitute market of Corso Regina Margherita, a wide popular street in Torino, Italy. In describing the tastes of male clients, the text presents the classes of girls:

Corso was a stretch of two hundred meters where Nigerian girls converged to hustle for male clients. It was surprising, or interesting to see that this unruly crowd had some kind of organization. Up front, near the over-head bridge, stood first-class girls. They were an abominable sight to behold! They were almost naked, putting on only pants and bras (mostly white)....

Further down were the second class; made up of every tender girls, mostly new comers. They wore short miniskirts and short blouses exposing their breasts. Those who did not have big breasts made up of by carefully stuffing their over-sized bra with rubber foam. Italians were crazy about *tete grosso*: large breasts (58-59).

The objectification of the female body shares certain psycho-sexual connection with the concept of *male gaze*. Male gaze, described as a lustful fixation on a woman's body, is a form of sexual

pleasure derivable by males from the bodies of females. This gaze indirectly highlights the mystery of the female body. Such expressions as "the female body is beautiful" apart from its exotic meaning of adulation for the female body also serves as an internal sexual motivation that informs the pursuit of the female as a sexual object. This carnal desire has fuelled the sexual exploitation of women across cultures.

In their seminal work, *Objectification Theory*, Fredrickson and Roberts provide a framework for understanding the experience of being female in a socio-cultural context that sexually objectifies the female body. This socio-cultural context is a sexually charged environment where men are desperate for a piece of female flesh. Edged on in part by women's perceived vulnerabilities and crave for attention, the female body is seen as a desirable asset. Desire becomes the driving force that sets the male in pursuit of the female. Sex therefore provides the site for conquering the female body. This socio-cultural orientation flourishes the innate desire in men to perceive women as sexual beings for procreation, pleasure and power. The anatomical built of the female body is alluring to say the least for its difference from the male. This creates a desire in him to see what is *different* from his. The process of facilitating this desire creates the tension and sadness that comes with objectification and exploitation.

Audrey Lordes quips that "sexual desire for the female body is both natural and cultural" (76). By being natural she infers the innate desire for intimacy and procreation existing between a man and a woman, but by being cultural, sexual desire becomes an expression of patriarchal and masculine dominance over the female, which expresses itself in all forms of exploitation. This dichotomy is presented in our texts. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, desire as being natural is captured in the love triangle involving Sisi, Peter and Luc. This triangle is created and maintained by the desire to know, feel and share. Peter is introduced as Sisi's first lover who has

high hopes for their life together. They enjoy the thrill and freeze of romantic love till the desire for a better livelihood takes her to Europe. In describing their love, we read of Peter's optimism,

I'll marry you one day, and I shall take you away from here," Peter swore, his voice firm like a schoolteacher's, as he wet his right index finger and pointed it up to the ceiling to accompany his oath. He walked toward her and held her around her waist, nuzzled the side of her face with the side of his. "I promise you. I'll take you away from all this, baby!" Another nuzzle (16).

But she wanted more. Peter's love was natural and romantic, but she wanted more. She needed a better life. In exploring her dilemma on the choice to stay or leave, the text narrates,

It was not as if she no longer loved him. She did. She loved the way his left eye half shut when he smiled. She loved the way he cradled her when they made love, breathing into her skin. She loved the way he grinned while he ate, as if the very act of eating, the thoughtful chewing, never mind what was being eaten, was pleasurable; an art to be cultivated, elevated, and enjoyed. But love had its limits. Peter did not have the means to turn her life around (17).

Her relationship with Peter provides for her a therapeutic experience as she reflects on the impact of his love on her in Europe. The text accounts that

In Europe, when she would no longer be Chisom and before Luc, this was what she would miss most about him. His hands around her waist. His breath warm against her face. His stubble scratching her cheek. She would believe that she would never find that kind of love again. That she would never hanker after the sort of intimacy that made her want to be completely subsumed by the other. She would be wrong on both counts (21).

Her relationship with Luc, the man she meets before her death is equally spirited and liberating. In describing her rejuvenation from the relationship, the text reads,

THE WORLD WAS EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD BE. NO MORE AND DEFINITELY no less. She had the love of a good man. A house. And her own money—still new and fresh and the healthiest shade of green—the thought of it buoyed her and gave her a rush that made her hum. These same streets she had walked before seemed to have acquired a certain newness. Humming, relishing the notion of new beginnings, she thought of how much her life was changing: Luc. Money. A house. She was already becoming someone else. Metamorphosing, she told herself, recalling the word from a biology class. Sloughing off a life that no longer suited her (1-2).

Other desires in the text involving Efe, Ama and Joyce are cultural. They are driven by the desire to control and exploit them. Efe loses her virginity at sixteen to a forty-five year old man. Why? Her desire for financial assistance, but more than that is the amorous advances of the lecherous adult who defiles her. This is graphically presented here:

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'd had no notion of what to expect, yet she had not thought it would be this lackluster, this painful nothing.

She felt somewhat cheated, *like pikin wey dem give coin wey no dey 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 very well compensated. The man who held her buttocks tight and swayed and moaned and was responsible for all that pain was forty-five. He



was old. Experienced. But, most important, he had money that was rumored to be endless. *Money wey full everywhere like san'son'*. He had promised Efe new clothes. New shoes. Heaven. Earth. And everything else she fancied between the two as long as she let him have his way. "Jus' tell me wetin you wan', I go give you. I swear! You don' turn my head, dey make me like man wey don drink too much *kai kai*. I go do anytin' for you. Anytin'" (28-29)!

This encounter is driven by his objectification of her body. There is this myth among most males about a 'fresh' young girl (a virgin) that makes the sight and pursuit of such girls a show of masculinity and conquest. We see this amorous objectification with Efe from her male gazer, and his efforts at getting between her legs:

The moaning in the backyard was a culmination of two and a half weeks of laying the groundwork since setting eyes on Efe as she admired a tricolored handbag in a stall close to his Everything For Your Hair supermarket: waylaying the girl as she came back from the market loaded with foodstuffs for the week. Offering her a ride in his car. Buying her a bottle of chilled CocaCola when they got stuck in traffic. Smuggling a crisp thousand-naira note into her shy fist as he dropped her off at her home. It was the last act that swayed her. It was not just the money, it was the crispness of it, the smell of the Central Bank still on it, the fact that he had drawn it out of a huge bundle of like notes, so that she believed all the stories she had heard of his enormous wealth. The smell was enough to make anyone giddy (29).

She yields for what he represents and offers. This scenario plays out severally in the text. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the obsession or objectification is on large breasts (*tete grosso*,

59). The Italians presented in the text who patronized prostitutes had a thing for buxom and voluptuous women. A scene involving Efe is recounted:

A flashy car drove past her and stopped suddenly. The girls rushed like bees unto a honey pot. Efe did not move. She did not even look their way. The man put the car in reverse and drove back, slowly, till he reached where Efe stood and stopped. She looked away. The man wound down the glass to look at her. What a beauty! She was tall, slim, with full breast that jutted out. A flat tummy and tiny waist sitting on well-curved hips. And her smile....., it was something else! A rare gem to find in this junk yard! He called out to her and she looked (61).

The objectification of the female body is what fuels the sexualisation of the female body. Here, women are perceived as instruments of sexual pleasure. Women as objects without emotions or a soul is the fallout of objectification theories. In the writing of Catherine Mackinnon, "objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another" (187). Her thesis postulates that the objectification of the female body is a reductionist attitude by the privileged male that excludes the humanity in her, while emphasizing her "sex-ality" (sexual assets, appeal and prowess). Postcolonial feminist theorists employ this postulation in their analysis of Postcolonial women, who themselves are victims of culture and gender.

Theorists such as Anne McClintock, Simeone De Beauvoir, Talpade Chandra Mohanty, and Ann Laura Stoler, favour the re-imaging of women as social beings, and not just sexual beings. Of critical importance is Stofer's *The Education of Desire and the Repressive Hypotheses* (1995). Her book is critical of the suppression of female desire against the background of societal

glorification of male desire. She advocates for the re-orientation of women through enlightenment and inspirational literatures that would give them a leeway into the scheme of things, especially issues relating to their sexuality that borders on sexual independence/control and sexual behaviour. Women should own their bodies. Sex should be *what they do*, and not *what happens to them*.

The objectification of the female body is not only male-initiated and generated; it is also a significant feminine behaviour. In this sense, objectification refers to the attitudes of self-love and beautification embarked upon by women to enhance their prospects in the social market. Lesbian and postcolonial feminist theorist, Lorde advocates "the objectification of their bodies by women as an expression of their beauty and sexuality" (33). Most modern women objectify themselves as an expression of their empowerment or as a show of power over the male. This is the thriving thrust of lesbianism, either as a critical inquest into the beauty of the female body, or as a social vengeance against the sexploitation and control of female bodies by men.

The female body is beautiful. It should be well taken care of and adored. This self-love motivates the cosmetic industry. It is the drive behind the fashion craze, and the precursor to male desire and gaze. In the nakedness of the female body lies a sacred mystery that connotes comfort, eroticism, pleasure and satisfaction. As a weapon for masculine control, the female body has become a fatalistic symbol that drives and rules the ego and masculinity of men. In our texts, this idea of objectification is fully exemplified. The women take great pains to appear presentable and seductive. The sexier the look, the greater the catch! Hence, their bodies become the bait for hooking the dignity, masculinity and monies of the men involved with them. Ama recounts in *On Black Sisters' Street*:

Young men want lovers. Who wants to be a lover for nothing? Old men just come to be fulfilled. They are not looking for love. They pay to get what they want. Some of them are widowers. Some have wives who no longer want to give them action. They come here, and we are the Viagra they need to face the world again (112).

The pleasure derived from their *well-tanned and manicured bodies is second to none*. That is their only concern, bodily pleasures. Recounting such liaisons, the text narrates,

Nobody knows Sisi's real name, never having used it... not even the men who had shared her bed, entangling their legs with hers. Mixing their sweat with hers. Moaning and telling her, "Yes. Yes. You Africans are sooooooo good at this. Don't stop. Please, You Are Killing Me (22)!"

In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the women dress seductively to market their 'assets'. The inordinate objective is to have the best catch among the numerous clients frequenting their district. This becomes a marketing strategy for attracting patronage.

In these texts, we see a clear predilection to promote sexuality and seduction over femininity and personal decency. They both highlight the ironical dilemma found in the world of sex merchandizing. On one hand are men steaming with a culturally ingrained notion of being the 'superior sex', thus exhibiting an insecure need to always assert themselves wherever a vulnerable or gullible female is found. Exploitation, subjugation and control are therefore paternalistic efforts at tapping into the vulnerabilities and gullibility of women by men. On the other hand also are women anxious to sell off their merchandize (their bodies) in well-intentioned and often times as we see in the texts forced costumes and cosmetics to the highest bidder. So, their bodies become an economic commodity for sensual and pecuniary benefits.

In summary, the objectification of the female body is a masculine socio-cultural imagination that is obsessed with the allure of female flesh. It favours a negative perception of women that reduces them to merely sex objects, devoid of being. A woman is first a human being, and not a *sex being*. This perception becomes the motivation to all forms of sexploitation, sexchanges and commodification. As our analysis have shown, the lead female characters are sexploited because of how they are perceived, conceived and received by the twin agents of economic privation and gendered realizations, social conflicts and conventions, which are both subject to control and abuse by masculine, and in few instances matriarchal attitudes and institutions. In our texts, the brothels are run by women who operate as fiendish characters, to whom the girls must kowtow or face sinister consequences.

#### **4.2 The Commodification and Commercialization of the Female Body**

Commodification is the process of turning out a material into a commodity for exchange. To commoditize is to sell something as a valuable product. Commodification as an economic concept is founded upon the value principle. This principle states that commodities packaged as value become an asset for economic benefits. The essence of Commodification is the privileging of marketable products as items of value and exchange. Commercialization deals with the psychology and practice of selling. Commercializing emphasizes selling off for the purpose of profiting and pleasure. To commercialize is to market out something that is considered an item of value and purchase.

In discussing the Commodification and commercialization of the female body in our texts, we see this economic activity employed cynically in the objectification and treatment of the female body. As fallout to gender-biased and racial based segregation and attitudes, the female body has become an economic item for Commodification and commercialization. One

would also add the effects of the grim economic realities that have forced many a woman to monetize her physical assets. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi chooses the ignoble path of prostitution to escape hardship in her hometown. The text reads of her resolve to escape, "she knew she could not stand another year in Lagos. Not like this. *I must escape* " (21). Elsewhere, we see Dele's proposition to her on helping her exit the country, "If you wan' comot from dis our nonsense country, come see me, make we talk" (23). It is obvious that economic freedom is the motivation for her flight. *Images from a Broken Mirror* takes us through the same episode.

In the text, we see the motivation for prostitution, "you're here to make money, not to make love" (57). The text also reports on a verbal outburst between Efe and her mother that reveals deep meditations on the dynamics of the sex industry to readers and critics alike:

... What hurts me most Mama, is that I know things are not too difficult for us in Nigeria. My father trained us all to be good children. He never wanted this kind of life for anyone of us. It was you who pushed me into this mess. Mama, I will never forgive you.

I pushed you into this mess because my business was going bad and I needed capital to beef it up. Your father teaches decency but does not have money to train the children. You cannot be decent on an empty stomach. We need to build a house and stop being tenants in our own land... My daughter, somebody has to make the sacrifice to make a family great. It might be the father, the mother or even the children. It has fallen on you to pay the price to build this family to a well-to-do one...

Your mates over there are doing the same for their people... (90).

Efe is therefore the future of her family. Her body becomes a seed for sowing the economic harvest her family intends to reap. This is the dilemma for the prostitute trapped in the burden of

personal, cultural, client and family expectations. The commodification and commercialization of the female body is anchored on the perception that the female body as an object of sexual utility should be merchandised. More often than not, it is the black female whose body is an article for sale. In our texts, the plight of black women is presented as they face demand for their supposedly voluptuous physical assets.

When it comes to the commoditization and commercialization of the female body, the black female is the most abused. This is traceable to the inglorious episodes of the Atlantic slave trade. The humanity of the black body was ruptured into an object to be bought and sold, in order to satisfy the economic and sexual desires of the white slave owners. Writing on the impact of the slave trade on black women, Iman Cooper observes that "overtime, the replication of individual choices to capture, buy, and trade African slaves created a societal structure that equalized the value of human life with a market value" (22). She further rationalizes that

When lives revolve around market values and are believed to be valuable only for the potential profitability they may bring, the very fabric that holds communities together shifts. Social and cultural ethics are then driven by economics, rather than human interaction. This was exactly what occurred with the commodification of black bodies as market objects. Hence, commodification was primarily driven by economics and rationalized through science where "economic exchange [transformed] independent beings into human commodities whose most "socially relevant feature was their exchangeability" (22).

The sexualization of the black female body is borne on a fetishization that exaggerates the sexual prowess and assets of the black female in comparison to her white counterpart. Words like "booty", "voluptuous", "fertile", "wide", "savage" and "buxom" are used as sexual metaphors to

describe the black female body, which suggests that she has been made for sex. Black women are seen as queans lacking in substance, and as such should be treated to sex liaisons at any opportunity. This explains the rationale between the sexualization of black slaves by their white masters. Cooper again writes that

This social conceptualization of the black body helps explain the rationale that allowed sexual exploitation of black slaves to both occur and be widely unchallenged by mainstream society, thus given rise to the growing mulatto generation (the visible sign of sexual encounters between black slaves and their white masters) (28).

In Alex Haley's autobiographical novel *Roots*, such sexual encounter is described between a black female slave, Kizzy, and her brutish white master:

Then the man was on his knees beside her, one of his hands choking back her screams - "please Massa please!" the other stuffing dirty burlap sacking into her *m* mouth until she gagged ... He banged her head against the floor, again, again, again, then he began slapping her ... until Kizzy felt her dress being snatched upwards, her undergarments being ripped. Frantically thrashing, the sack in her mouth muffling her cries, she felt his hand fumbling upwards her thighs, finding, fingering her private parts, squeezing and spreading them ... Then came the searing pain as he forced his way into her... (397).

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, we see a similar violation, but this time involving a helpless black teenager, Joyce, and a bunch of malevolent and testosterone driven Janjaweed militia soldiers:

The soldiers looked at her. A bean pole. Breasts like baby mangoes straining against her flowered dress. One of the soldiers smiled. A lopsided grin that caused her to instinctively cross her arms over her chest. He laughed. A long laughter that held no



mirth but took its time in dying down. He slapped her hands away. Grabbed her breasts. Pinched them as if testing some fruit for firmness before buying. Her nipples hurt under his fingers. "Stupid African slave" (102)!

Joyce narrates this horrifying encounter further graphically:

*He tore my dress. I fought, but he tore my dress. And. And. And threw me on the bed.* She tried to bite him. He felt her teeth graze his arm and slapped her. She dug her nails into his arm. Another slap. She aimed for his eyes. He pinned her hands down. / *-wanted to gouge his eyes out.* She wanted to inflict on him a darkness that he could never emerge from. A pain in her back. One of the other soldiers had hit her with the butt of a rifle. She could not stop it. A scream. It catapulted her brother from his hiding place. A soldier aimed his gun at him and shot. Lifted him off his feet. Landed him with a *whack* on the floor. He did not make a sound. Not before. And not after. Alek tried to scream but could not. Her voice failed her. And then her body followed suit. A warm trickle from between her legs. Soaking her dress. The soldier on top of her slapped her. "Why are you urinating on the bed?" Another slap. "Stupid bitch!" Slap. Slap. No energy to fight back as he spread her legs. He tore off her underwear. She imagined that she saw her mother cover her face with her hands so that she did not have to watch. When he thrust his manhood inside her, when he touched her, Alek felt a grief so incomprehensible that she could not articulate it beyond chanting, "This is not happening. This is not happening." A mantra to keep away the layer upon layer of pain that seared through her as he went in and out of her, groaning like a dying man. One by one the other men thrust themselves into her, pulling out to come on her face.

Telling her to ingest it; it was protein. Good food. Fit for African slaves (102-103).

In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, we experience another horrifying episode. The text reads:

"Uncle Victor, please! Uncle Victor, please! Uncle Victor, please!" Efe kept hearing in her sleep. The voice kept coming closer and louder until Efe became aware that it was not a dream. It was Kate's tender voice screaming and asking for help. Efe opened her eyes, all the girls in the room had woken up but no one dared to move. They could hear the noise as the little girl struggled with somebody.... They could hear Victor panting and saying, "Take it easy girl, take it easy..." Finally Victor opened the door. He was panting and sweating, with a mischievous smile of satisfaction on his face.... wearing shorts and singlet with sweat beads on his face. Kate was lying on the bed barely covering her nakedness. Her shirt was torn, exposing one of her young, full breasts which pointed menacingly to the ceiling. She was weeping sorrowfully... (27).

When women are commodified, they are treated as objects. As objects, they are subject to use and abuse by their male masters and companions. Rape is borne out of this commodifying perception of the female body. Our texts present commodified black women, who are treated as cheap articles for the pleasure of men. As black women, they face the double enemy of racism and gender bias. This is what is treated in postcolonial feminist theory, this dialectal experiential dilemma of the black woman or woman of color. The search for identity and survival makes them vulnerable to being commercialized as items of sexual trade. The texts in focus make no attempt to hide or deny this situation. The female characters are thrown into the mold of expectations to escape out of poverty and despair unto bliss and fulfillment with nothing but faith

in their privates to provide the needed independence. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, we see a glowing summary for both texts:

The women are not sure what they are to one another. Thrown together by a conspiracy of fate... they are bound in a sort of unobtrusive friendship, comfortable with whatever little they know of one another, asking no question unless they are prompted to, sharing deep laughter and music in their sitting room, making light of the life that has taught them to make the most of the trump card that God has wedged between their legs, dissecting the men who come to them (men who spend nights lying on top of them or under them, shoving and fiddling and clenching their brown buttocks and finally [mostly] using their fingers to shove their own pale meat in) in voices loud and deprecating... (17).

The central direction for the commercialization of the female body is prostitution. Prostitution is the art of marketing the sexual wares of the female to potential buyers (clients) who pay with their monies. The black female body is one of the most prostituted across the globe. Our texts reveal this. What accounts for the high demand of the black female? Could it be her perceived sensuality and voluptuousness? I am tempted to think so. The desire of the black female in the sex trade is of critical concern to our texts. Are they desired because of their value or for their sexual vulnerability and wildness, which some considers as a turn on for intense sexuality? This is exemplified in *Images from a Broken Mirror*. The text commenting on the desire for young African (black) females reads:

When one made the fingers' sign it showed that she was a new arrival. To the Italians, a new arrival meant freshness, original and unadulterated. Like waiting for the palm wine tapper at the foot of the palm tree to take a gulp of the excitingly refreshing

drink before he had time to put some additive. *She was fresh from Africa!* It was not uncommon to hear the regular patronizers of these girls boast to one another, "I knew that girl when she first came from Africa. It was an experience to stay with her... she was intact (60).

This thinking is an aftermath of colonialism. Under colonialism, black women were seen as items for sexual hibernation, a natural pleasure they relaxed to after touring their plantations. According to James Brain, "the history of the African female figure has been linked to the vast project of colonialism, as the sex and gender role conflicts in post-colonial Africa are partly as a result of social structures that arose during the colonial period" (15). The social structures mentioned by Brain include amongst others slavery. Writing on this, Cooper mentions that

The horror of the institution of slavery during the late eighteenth century was not that it displaced millions of African people from their homes to the US, but rather that it laid the foundation for the commodification and dehumanization of the black *female* body that was culturally, socially, and politically maintained for hundreds of years to come (21).

Black women have been subjects of sexual violence either as victims of racial injustice, or victims of masculine attitudes and controls. For Greene, "the sexual exploitation and victimization of black women from the days of slavery to the present has led to media images and stereotypes of Black women as sexual aggressors and sexual savages" (55). In the sex industry, they are at the fore front with their endowed assets, and are often victims of violence. Sisi dies in *On Black Sisters' Street* in a brawl with a strange fellow, believed to be Segun, her madam's errand boy. The other girls live in constant fear of Dele and Madam, their trade

benefactors and debtors. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, Buki, an African sex worker dies treacherously. The text recounts:

She lay half naked, one shoe in her leg, the other in her hand with which obviously, she tried to defend herself from her assailant. Her stomach was ripped open and her white mini skirt stained in a horrifying redness. Her face was twisted in pain, and an elongated tongue stuck out between her teeth, flecked with bloody foam like some terrible heathen painting (106).

Prostitutes are abused and ill-represented because of their perception as commodities for sex. They serve no familial function, and fulfill neither the domestic nurturance nor reproductive roles usually assigned to women. For prostitutes, they are no longer received as human beings, but as *sex beings*. They are social and economic disposables whose value lies in their provision of sexual services to men. Elizabeth writes that "a prostitute is a sexual commodity; a bundle of product attributes whose primary role is to serve as an object or product consumed by men" (23). Going further, she highlights that:

The terms used to signify a female prostitute indicate that she is a thing rather than a person - an entity limited to her sexual role. Descriptors are synonyms derived from her working hours ("lady of the evening"), working conditions ("street walker"), body parts ("piece of ass"), and anatomical resemblances to animal life ("beaver," "pussy") (24).

In our texts, these descriptions abound. The women involved in the *flesh* trade are valued on the basis of their sexual abilities.

In summary, the commodification and commercialization of the female body centres on her sexiness, and marketability as a sex product. The female body is almost always

commoditized through its sexualization. In her essay, "The Fetishization and Objectification of the Female Body in Victorian Culture," Hannah Aspinall writes that:

The female body has long been idealised, objectified and fetishized and this can be seen clearly in Victorian culture and *postcolonial culture* (emphasis mine). Social rules and guidelines on how the female body should look, and how it should be dressed, objectified the body and encoded femininity within these rules. This made the portrayal of the female body a space for expression, oppression and sexual commodification (10).

This reductionist practice is self-deprecating to women, and strips them of their humanity. Women are human beings before they are sexual beings. As human beings, they should be respected and valued, and as sexual beings, they should have the choice to express their sexuality.

In the next chapter, we see this symbolic expression of defiance and independence as we explore the symbolizing generalizations of the female body in our texts. Commoditizing the bodies of women, especially black women is an emasculation of their femininity. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Polycarp sells off Joyce to Dele into prostitution in Belgium in the most deceitful of ways, thus equating her to an item no longer needed. In narrating the ignoble transaction, the text reads:

Polycarp took a huge gulp of his beer. "Oga Dele, this is Alek. I told you already about her Alek crossed her arms and looked from one man to the other. Dele pointed at her, slapped his thighs, and burst into fresh gales of laughter, holding his head in his hands as if the force of the laughter would snap it off... Anger rose in Alek's throat and threatened to make her shout, but she pushed it down. What would she say

she was angry about? She had no energy left for anger. The soldiers who raped her that night in Daru had taken her strength, and Polycarp's betrayal had left her unwilling to seek it back. From now on, she resolved, she would never let her happiness depend on another's. She would never let anyone hurt her. She would play life's game, but she was determined to win...

She was to take passport pictures. A passport and visa would be organized. Money would be paid. Lots of it, but it did not have to be paid at once. She would be taken to Belgium (124).

For the girls commercialized as prostitutes, nothing good comes easy. Being commercialized becomes the way out to being liberated and rewarded, a soul flight indeed to Eldorado! Summarizing their resolve to make it at all cost, whether economic freedom or independence from men, Brian Chikwava writes wittily, "armed with a vagina and the will to survive, she (they) knew that destitution would never lay claim to them" (1). This statement becomes a rallying point that motivates the women in Europe, making them heroes and survivors.

The postcolonial feminist import therefore is the representation of the commodification and commercialization of the female body as a thriving source for the subjugation of postcolonial women, exported as sexual commodities to satisfy the contractual demands of their masters, who in the texts are also postcolonial subjects, and the lust of their white male patrons. For the postcolonial feminist critic, under a culture of subjugation and lack of alternatives, black women have to themselves their bodies as a means to certain psychological and economic freedom, and also as a reminder of their checkered history as *weak* cultural subjects who are meant to survive under a harsh system that favors masculinity, and the same

time service the sexual lust and liberties of their male counterparts. Travis Lorca quips that "sex for the postcolonial woman becomes a double symbol, one, a means to further enforce her slavery and subjugation, and two, as a transactional asset for yielding economic dividends." (18). Women in general, but black women in particular would do anything to survive. Stories abound around the world of '*sex for providence*' transactions, where women give up their womanhood in exchange for crops to plant, clothes to wear, or even monies for personal dignity.

Women in postcolonial cultures forced to thrive under oppressive patriarchal and masculinist systems are caught in these transactions. For a black woman, family is of utmost importance. She would do anything to give them certain leverages, even if it is at the cost of her dignity. Her white counterpart may or may not be interested in such maternal responsibilities. Her sole devotion to her *happiness* (western feministic thought) sets her against any limiting factor. The analysis of sex merchandising in the texts in focus takes this to consideration. *In on Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi accepts Dele's offer for the sake of escaping the hardship in her environment, Efe, for the sake of providing for her son, Ama, for her psychological and economic independence, and Joyce, for economic independence. The motivation is the same in *Images from a Broken Mirror*. The postcolonial feminist concern in these texts is on the *why* for the choices and actions of these black women. As the texts exposes to us, the desperate need to escape and overturn the cultural and psychological dilemmas they find themselves in is the basis for their *baptism* into the world of sex merchandise.

For other postcolonial feminist critics like Lordes, "while white women go into prostitution for the independence and power over men it gives them, black women are forced into it by the circumstances of their culture and homeland, a means for survival" (34). The



veracity of her thesis opens up critical inquest into the socio-cultural motivations for the sexual transactions we find in the texts.

### **4.3 The Symbolizing Generalizations of the Female Body**

The female body is a cultural symbol that represents motherhood, fecundity, sexuality, and empowerment. In postcolonial feminist thought, the black female body is a cultural site for interpreting the control and subjugation of black women at the hands of patriarchal forces and masculinist mentalities. The female body is also a source for the conceptualization of symbols referencing its life and power. As a symbol of motherhood, the female body nurtures and sustains life. As a symbol of fecundity, the female body is a site for fertility and fruitfulness. As a symbol of sexuality, the female body is a source for pleasure, emotional, sensual and psychological. As a symbol of empowerment, the female body is a weapon for feminine control and authority over maleness and socio-cultural biases.

Feminists such as postcolonial and lesbian feminists are strong advocates for the adulation and enthronement of the female body, especially the black female as an empowering tool over male domination and racial bias. Tracing the history of oppression for the black women, Janell Hobson observes that "black female bodies have been conventionally seen as strong reproductive bodies, apt for the hard work in plantations, representing the opposite of the weakness and delicacy of the white female body" (12). Elsewhere she mentions that "simultaneously, black female bodies at the time of the slave trade and later, were associated with primitiveness, savagery and sexual deviancy, inviting to both sexual and colonial conquest" (26). Corroborating this thesis is Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz's "Re-writing our bodies and identities," where she argues that

Black bodies were also the instruments for the reproduction of the slavery system and colonization movement: they were especially fit for maternity, putting forward their fertility through their big breasts and bottoms, so that blackness in women became synonymous with ugliness" (15).

Refuting this bland picture of black women is Manuel Coppola. In her "All my Weapons within me: Bodily Archives in the Caribbean Diaspora," she argues that the female black body is beautiful and desirable. She writes "the desirability of the black female by her white master is a proof of her sexiness in spite of the dirty mode of slavery she is always casted in" (15).

For our texts, at the surface, they chronicle chilling narratives of the precarious experiences of black female prostitutes in Italy and Belgium respectively, but beneath this bleak narration is a subtle message of empowerment and independence through the sextivities of the female characters involved. Accepting the uncertainties of Dele's offer to Europe signifies a breaking away from the cultural norms and economic bleakness of their homelands. They go to Europe with an optimism that belies their sense of desperation for freedom. For them, going to Europe is an invitation away from poverty to opportunities, and fear to hope. Europe becomes the fulfilment of a dream for independence and dignity. Sex therefore becomes a welcoming symbol for divorcing from their past to embracing a future of possibilities, though at a cost, the transaction of their womanhood. Sex is now a symbol for life, hope and power.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the female leads, Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama are thrown into prostitution by similar needs: Sisi and Efe (economic independence); Joyce and Ama (cultural/psychological independence). They band together to survive, first, the demands of their patrons, second, the demands of their flesh being transformed into sex objects, and third, the demands of their inglorious benefactors, Dele and Madam. Sisi emerges in the text as a rallying

point for them. She becomes a source for psychological remembering after she dies. Sisi's death opens up a can of revelations into their past. Their confessions reveal the face in Efe's hidden photograph, Ama's lifelong search for a father, Joyce's true name, and Sisi's deepest secret - and all their tales of fear, displacement, and love, concluding in a chance meeting with a handsome, sinister stranger.

Sisi experience a transformation in the text. As the main character and pivot of the plot, the novel becomes a sort of bildungsroman for her. She grows from the shock and repudiation of first sex her meet to being a confident and successful sex worker. Her first scene is described here:

In a men's toilet with lavender toilet paper littering the floor, soggy (with urine?), and a shiny black toilet seat, Dieter pulled his trousers down to his ankles. A flash of white boxers. A penis thundering against them. A massive pink knob. Sisi gawked. Everything she had heard about the white man's flaccidity, his penis as small as a nose (so that the greatest insult she could heap on an annoying schoolmate was that he had the penis of a white man), was smashed. He heaved and moaned; one hand tore at his boxers and the other at Sisi's skirt. His breath warm against her neck, his hands pawing every bit of her; he licked her neck, Sisi shut her eyes. Raising his head, he stuck his tongue into her ear. In. Out. In. Out. Eyes shut still; she tried to wriggle out of his embrace. She did not want to do this anymore. "I don't need this. Stop!" she said. He held her close. Pushed her against the wall, his hands cupping her buttocks, and buried his head in her breasts. "Stop," she shouted again. Eyes open, she saw his face, his mouth open and his jaws distended by an inner hunger. "Stop!" His moans swallowed her voice. His penis searched for a gap between her legs.

Finding a warmth, he sighed, spluttered sperm that trickled down her legs like mucus, inaugurating Sisi into her new profession (115-116).

Here, we see Sisi struggling to come to terms with the reality of what she is doing. Her body is sacred to her. It symbolizes her innocence and delicacy. The thought of a stranger on her is akin to yielding to a dog. Giving in to a stranger is an experience too bitter to taste, but she does it. As we would encounter in the text, Sisi grows from this. Later, we see her mature self excited about her trade and the thought of satisfying her clients:

When Madam brought the news that she had found Sisi a display window in the Schipperskwartier, on the Vingerlingstraat, Sisi came close to hugging her. Working the windows was a better job. The window girls were by far classier than the cafe girls. Mannequins in lingerie and high boots, they exuded a confidence, an arrogance that Sisi was sure she could master. It would be easier to do her job from the security and the privacy of a window booth. She could see her life before her: money. And more money. A return to Nigeria with a poise and a wallet that Chisom never could have had.

Sisi learned the rates pretty quickly. She always had a head for figures. Fifty Euros for a P&S, a blow job. A bit more if a French kiss was required. Twice the price for half an hour of everything: P&S, French kissing, and full penetration. With a condom. Without a condom, the client paid thirty Euros extra. Sisi did not like to do without—what with everything one could catch—but thirty Euros was not something she found easy to turn her nose up at. It took a lot of strong will to do so.

She learned to stand in her window and pose on heels that made her two inches taller. She learned to smile, to pout, to think of nothing but the money she would be making.

She learned to rap on her window, hitting her ring hard against the glass on slow days to attract stragglers. She learned to twirl to help them make up their minds, a swirling mass of chocolate mesmerizing them, making them gasp and yearn for a release from the ache between their legs; a coffee-colored dream luring them in with the promise of heaven (126-127).

At this point, she has fully accepted her profession, as her passport to greatness and freedom. For her, her body becomes an empowering tool for her rebirth from Chisom to Lucky. When she meets Luc, a man she loves, we see another transformation for her. She plans a post-sex trade life. Her relationship with Luc creates an existential dilemma that borders on surrendering to the love he offers and leaving her chequered life. Luc reminds her "What can they do to you, anyway? What are you so afraid of? What—what are you afraid of? Why don't you leave? Don't you love me enough?" (145). But, we also see his reason behind this which can be interpreted as selfish and controlling,

So stop. All this rushing from my arms into someone else's. I don't like it." It was as if he had not heard her. "It makes me jealous. Very jealous. I want you all to myself, you know that."

From the very first time they slept together, Luc had insisted on total ownership of her body. Monopolizing her affections was not enough. "I don't like it (145).

The maturation process into an empowered and fully independent woman begins here. The bodies of these women become a source for the stirring of carnal pleasures for the men involved with them. The men come to them, or at least assault them becomes of the liberties they get with them.

White women are traditionally presented as moral, decent, religious and prudish, while blacks are seen as wild, amoral and eclectic in sexual taste. This is the reason why the white masters engaged in sex with their black female slaves, so they could fulfil certain desires they would not take out on their puritanical white wives. In the arms of the so-called *savages*, they found sexual fulfilment.

For these black female prostitutes in the texts, their bodies become a sexual magnet for attracting the riches of their white male customers. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the girls are reminded of their mission, "you're here to make money, not to make love. So, once you collect money from them you should be quick with it and come down to hustle for another client. The earlier you finish paying your debt the better for you" (57).

Postcolonial feminist analyze literal texts as cultural symbols, symbols that contain the collective memories of a people trapped in the burden of colonialism, and the dilemmas of their expectation for independence and survival. The texts in focus are not in any way different. As postcolonial texts, they converse about the culture of oppression and injustice that mortgages the will and decency of young black women to the uncertainties of the sex trade. Like black slaves of the late eighteenth century, these women are ferried off to Europe in search of greener pastures and freedom from their homelands and past. Europe becomes a recurring myth that assures of prosperity and fulfilment. They gamble the 'safety' of their lives for the green lights of Europe. For Efe, she accepts Dele's offer to Europe to give a better future to her son, L.I. The text reads:

She had agreed to Dele's terms before she asked what she was expected to do abroad. "Clean?" To which Dele laughed and said, "No. Sales." It was the way he sized her up, his eyes going from her face to her breasts to her calves under her knee-length skirt, that told her what sort of sales she was going to be involved in. She would be

Dele and Sons Limited's export. L.I. would get a better life. Go to good schools, become a big shot, and look after her when she was old and tired. L.I. was a worthy enough investment to encourage her to accept Dele's offer. And even though leaving him would be the hardest thing she would ever do, she would endure it for his sake (45).

They go on their own volition, not forced. Sisi recounts to Luc "He didn't exactly tie my hands and feet and dump me on the plane, you know. I could have chosen not to come. I was a grown woman, and he did explain the situation to me" (145). In these narratives, the authors employ the black women characterized as canvasses for painting the glittering but sinister world of the sex trade. Their experiences in the texts becomes a captivating metaphor for discussing the nature of gender and race, and their influence on sexuality and power for women in general, and black women in particular. The texts become symbols for analyzing the burden of the black woman in the face of cultural and racial subjugation, and her desperate attempts to cross the line into independence and selfhood.

What this means is that Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street* and Efe in *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the two titular characters on which the narratives revolves become mythical symbols defying the forces of gender and racial oppression. They emerge as narrative heroines who break away from the usual trajectory of self-pity and disillusionment for the black woman caught in a demanding, yet oppressive culture to become stimulators for change, growth and independence in their respective texts. The prevailing cultures against women we encounter in the texts are solely sexual, dehumanizing and oppressive. On her first night in Belgium, Sisi is reminded of her task. The text, *On Black Sisters' Street* reports:

Sisi was shown into a sardonic room with a single bed dressed up in impossibly white sheets. The whiteness shone bright, astonishing her. She ran her hands over the sheets, feeling the softness of the cotton, reveling in the richness of the texture. The walls were red, the same blood red of the sitting room. And on them hung two pictures: a white girl lying on her back, naked with legs splayed in a tanned V. She sucked on a lollipop. The other picture was of an enormous pair of brown buttocks jutting out at the camera. Buttocks with no face, two meticulously molded clay pots. Sisi wondered for a minute whose they were those firm, wide buttocks, unmarked by stretch marks. She wondered if her buttocks looked like that. And for a moment she felt slightly self-conscious (54)

The expression *buttocks with no face, two meticulously moulded clay pots* suggest the objectification of the female body. It connotes "sexual freshness," "voluptuousness," and "wildness." The undue emphasis on the sexiness of the black female becomes a turning point for the texts as a possible sexo-cultural narrative opening up the sexual privileging of the black female by the white male.

Another important symbolizing generalization of the female body in these texts is the perception of the female body as a site for exploitation, control and violence. The violence recorded against women in the texts is sexual, an intimate violation of their feminine pride and honour. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, black female prostitutes are haunted and killed. In describing the deaths of two prostitutes, the text reads that "people shouted and cried as they saw the brutally massacred bodies..." (106). Reporting on the violence, the text reads of another incident involving blacks, "the police had found another two dead bodies of black girls in a bush



in the outskirts of Torino, killed in almost the same manner as the other two" (110). Describing the sombre mood in the community, the text reports that

The streets became dry with black prostitutes keeping off entirely. This last development made every black girl see herself as the next possible victim. The thought was so haunting that they could be seen in the day at Porta Pallazzo, nestled together in little groups, talking in low tones and looking fearfully at any white man that passed their way. Panic written all over their faces (110-111).

What was the motivation behind such cruelty? The text avers that "the theory was put across that whoever was doing this must be a black hater..." (110).

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, we see the same violence, but this time by blacks against blacks. Here, Alek narrates to an aid worker "how she had heard the shots that killed her parents. How the soldiers had taken turns raping her. How she had watched her brother die, his brains splattered on the walls of her parents' room" (104), and of Goya, another helpless victim of gender violence, "who was dragged to a tree behind her family home by two *Janjaweed* soldiers". She was raped so violently that, six months later, she was still bleeding" (105), and also of the woman "whose name she could never remember talk about how her fourteen-year-old son was forced to have intercourse with her. A gun at his head. Soldiers in his ear. "Touch her breasts! Put your penis in her" (105)!

The retinue of abuse continues. The black woman's body has seen a history of sexual violence meted against her. It has become a site for the conceptualization of abuse. Abuse here refers to the sexual politics that pervades the divide of race and gender. This politics has as its agenda the domination of women, either by blacks or by whites. In our texts, the two differences are conceived. The sexual politics that negotiates sexuality for black women also empowers them

as agents of control. The female body also serves a platform for the manipulation of sexual power, or *bottom power*. Women have been known to exert sexual influence on men. This control is what creates value for them. Their privates become economic assets for commanding financial and psychological power.

The women in our text go into prostitution under the control and influence of men, but they emerge as independent ladies. By losing their femininity to prostitution, they develop their sexualities into valuable instruments for personal transformation. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the women use their experiences as a rallying point for developing a sisterhood, and a turning point for pursuing their independence. Joyce grows from being a raped teenager to becoming an accomplished lady. The text reports:

Four years after Sisi died, Joyce would go back to Nigeria with enough capital to set up a school in Yaba. She would employ twenty-two teachers, mainly young women, and regularly make concessions for bright pupils who could not afford the school fees. She would call it Sisi International Primary and Secondary School, after the friend she would never forget (152).

Others experience the same transformation. By this, we see that their prostitution served as an empowering tool that liberated them. Though they were prostitutes, they had a sense of responsibility to create something better. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, Efe experiences a baptism as she listens to a conversation between Carlo, her intending fiance and his father about her:

I'm giving you this advice because I'm your father, and should know more than you in these matters. It is enough nightmare marrying a normal woman not to talk of an....

"What makes her abnormal, Papa?" "You are asking me? If I must say it out for you to understand, her profession of course..."

"Her former profession." Carlo cut him short. "Former, present or future, a prostitute is a prostitute. Once a woman has hit the street, you can never restrict her to the home" (120).

His concern reveals a puritanical attitude toward prostitutes that identified them as promiscuous women subject to punishment. He goes on to say that "it is not just the physical aspect of having to sleep with different men, but the psychological issue of insatiability. It is the lack of self-contentment that makes a woman sell her body for money" (121). This becomes the turning point for her. Describing her shock at Carlo's father's statements, the text reveals:

Efe felt a terrible headache. She could not stand it anymore. She tiptoed away from the door and walked into the street, she had no destination but just kept walking...she was momentarily deranged. The first thing that came to her mind was suicide but she decided against it. Murder? No. The old man may be right. He wants the best for his son" (122).

She resolves to go back home. The text reads that

All she had left after paying for the ticket would be two thousand dollars too small an amount to travel to Nigeria with. But she did not mind. Whatever the sacrifice she made to escape from this dehumanizing situation would be well worth it-whatever other girls did to survive decently in Nigeria she was ready to do that (123).

The epiphany she experiences at the end is provoked by the unfortunate deaths that befell her colleagues. In this text, prostitution is frowned at as a debasing profession and choice: "it is a wrong decision for anybody to decide to take to a shameful profession in order to make

money..." (122). There are no heroes from the scars of the trade. But in *On Black Sisters' Street*, heroes emerge from the dark slums of the sex trade. They become empowering figures symbolizing the rebirth of the black woman, Efe, Joyce and Ama. Sisi's death becomes the motivation that pushes the girls to overcome their situations. Ama would become a business woman. The text reads "Ama, ironically, would be the one to open a boutique. She would make Mama Eko (*her godmother*) its manager. Mama Eko would tell she knew Ama would make it. They would never talk about Ama's years in Europe" (153). Efe on her own would become a Madam with her own retinue of girls working for her. Their association with Sisi paves way for their enlightenment.

In conclusion, the focus here has been the symbolization of the female body in our texts. What has been established by this discourse is that the female body is a site for historical, cultural, and psychological remembering, a remembering that fosters nostalgic feelings and experiences of abuse, degradation, betrayal, and the resultant hopelessness. In our texts, the bodies of the females represented are sites for pleasure and degradation. They are also illustrated as cultural symbols that envision independence and create it. Sexual violence in the forms of rape and child abuse are indicators of the masculine power politics that plays out in the texts; the power to control, intimidate and assert superiority. The women involved are hapless victims caught up in racial and gender conflicts that impose restrictions on them. For Ruiz, "the black female body is the locus of commodification and fetishization connected with black women's sexuality and their role in the marketplace as objects and agents of desire" (22).

This is extended to the sexual pleasures given in the texts. On one hand is sexual pleasure as an intimate release between two lovers (Sisi, Peter and Luc; Joyce and Polycarp, all in *On Black Sisters' Street*, and Efe and Carlo in *Images from a Broken Mirror*), and on the other hand

is sexual pleasure commodified. This is where the prostitution rings of Dele and Madam (*On Black Sisters' Street*) and Doctor and Madam Grace (*Images from a Broken Mirror*) is situated.

The philosophy of prostituting black females is traced to a historical difference that perceives black women as sexually exciting, a territory to conquer. Debra Curtis writes that "in this sense, it is essential to bear in mind that "the market economy thrives on difference and is dependent on the production of desire," and that "sexuality is produced and mediated by culturally specific historical and social processes" (95). Wang Lei then adds that "in other words, black female sexuality has been traditionally defined as deviant...and the lure for the Whiteman comes from that difference socially and historically constructed (47). Harriet Jacob's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave* published in 1861 as one of the few firsthand accounts of slavery from an American female writer buttress the significance and measure of this deviant sex.

In the texts, especially *On Black Sisters' Street*, prostitution is the means to independence. Towards the end of the text, we see Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce reminiscing on their experiences and ambitions. For Sisi, "she had more than paid her dues, and now she could reclaim her life, and by Jove she would. She would get rid of Sisi, let a fire consume Sisi, char her, and scatter her ashes" (147). The march towards independence is largely commanded by Sisi who feels that

She would not have to work hard only to send her money to Dele. The man was fleecing them. How much did it cost him to get a passport? Get a visa? She was aware that he was bringing in girls almost on a monthly basis. There was no reason why she should work to line the pockets of a man whose pockets were already bulging. *Greedy man! I'll be shut of him.* Up until now she had never defaulted on her

payment. And she always paid more than minimum because she wanted to be done with it in the shortest possible time (146).

The text ends on a positive note for the women as they accomplish what they set out to do, save for Sisi whose life is cut short, but had earlier severed ties with her masters, Dele and Madam, and "was ready to deal with whatever the consequences might be" (150). Sisi's death becomes redemptive for the lives of other women in the text. Her death offers them the opportunity to evaluate their own lives, and forge a united front against the intimidation and subjugation of their masters, Dele and Madam. They succeed.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the research work. It summarizes the discourses entertained thus far, and offers a re-assessment of the critical points raised. The objective is to provide a birds-eye view of the entire research. It also includes an alphabetical list of the bibliographical resources employed in the research.

### 5.1 Summary

This work delivers theoretical and textual analysis on Sexuality and the Balance of Power in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Tony Alum's *Images from a Broken Mirror*. Analyzing with the critical postulations of postcolonial feminism, the thesis propounded is that sexuality is a social phenomenon that has racial, gender, economic and psychological implications for women. It is one of those cultural identities that has influenced and defined the cause and state of women from time immemorial. From the standpoint of the black woman or postcolonial woman, sexuality operates at an intersection between racial prejudice, gendered conversations and experiences, and social expectations.

Citing examples from the Combahee River Collective (a black Feminist group in Boston whose name comes from the guerrilla action conceptualized and led by Harriet Tubman on June 2, 1863, in the Port Royal region of South Carolina. This action freed more than 750 slaves and is the only military campaign in American history planned and led by women), Tyagi asserts that "for a Black woman the issue of race and sex are not separate from each other. Rape, for example, by White men lead to racial, sexual as well as political oppression" (48). Going further on their arguments, Tyagi explains that

That sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class

and sexual oppression because in our lives they are expressed simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g., the history of rape of Black women by White men as a weapon of political repression (48).

What this means for a black woman is that the act of sexual aggression against her by White men is a re-enacting of colonial intimidation and exploitation. We also find black women being aggressively sexualized by black men and women, especially for commercial and psychological benefits. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Joyce, Efe and Ama are sexualized by black men. Joyce and Ama are victims of masculine violence (rape), while Efe is exploited as a sex commodity. It is crucial to state here that the brothel they work for in Belgium is owned by Dele and Madam. Dele reminds us of his masculine power over the girls and on the market:

"Yes, yes, Kate. I trust you. I trust say you go take the necessary steps. Dat gal just fin' my trouble. She cost me money. How much money you pay de police? I know. Yes. Tell de gals make dem no try insubordinate me. I warn all da gals, nobody dey mess with Senghor Dele. Nobody! You treat these gals well and wetin dey go do? Just begin misbehave. Imagine! All my gals, I treat good. I dey tell dem before dem comot I dey dey straight wit dem. Me, I be good man. I just dey try to help poor gals. Yes, I know. Na good worker we lose but gals full *boku* for Lagos. I get three lined up. Latest next week, dem visa go ready. Dem full for front, full for back. I swear, dem go drive *oyibo* mad. Na beauty-queen statistics dem get. You sabi as my gals dey dey nah, no be gorillas I dey supply. Na beauty queens! Gals wey carry double Jennifer Lopez *nyash*. Who talk say na Jennifer Lopez get the finest buttocks? Dem never see my women." He boasted and laughed, and his breasts, which were almost



womanly, shook with laughter. Two mounds of flesh going up and down. And up and down. *Humph humph humph humph*. A hippopotamus (158).

Madam is also a brooding image of fear and control over the girls. Commenting on her character, the text narrates her first encounter with Joyce:

As soon as she stepped into the house in the Zwartzusterstraat and saw the long thin mirror, she started to have doubts about the sort of job she had been brought in to do. When Madam came in to see her that first day and she asked, "Where are the children I am supposed to be looking after?" and Madam laughed so hard that tears streamed down her face, then said, "Which children? Which *yeye* children?" she felt a sandstorm whirling in her, painting the walls a dusty, murky brown. Madam had given her two days of "grace." And then she had to start. "Start what?" She eyed the lingerie Madam threw at her in suspicion. "Earning your keep. *Oya*, time to open shop! Time to work! Time to work! Chop! Chop!" A laughing dancing-clapping Madam bullied her out of the house, into the car, and to the Schipperskwartier. No passport. No money. What was she to do (125)?

In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the same scenario plays out. Frank is the pimp that introduces Efe to prostitution in Italy. On citing a group of ill-clad women pacing down the streets, Efe asks "who are these people?" he replies "what is your business?" "Another thing you have to learn in Europe is to mind your own business. Think only of the things that concern you" (15). But he smiled under his breath

My young girl, these people you are seeing are you, he thought inside him. It is like seeing yourself in the mirror. Each one of them represents you in a different face.

They are prostitutes and that is what you have accepted to be. That is what you have come to Europe to be... (15).

When Victor is reprimanded for raping Kate, a young virgin, he shows forth a masculine arrogance as he quips "she should be grateful to me for teaching her chosen profession to her. If she had entered Italy a virgin, her madam would have had to pay somebody to do the job for her. Maybe some ruffian, who wouldn't be as careful as I was this night. And that would be an unpleasant memory for her for as long as she lives (30). Her rape becomes an initiation into her profession. Their madam, Grace is no less a fiendish character. She reminds the girls "you're here to make money, not to make love. So, once you collect money from them you should be quick with it and come down to hustle for another client. The earlier you finish paying your debt the better for you" (57).

Postcolonial feminist theorists remind us that sexuality is a thriving discourse and field for rethinking the historical and cultural treatment of black women. Aniekwu reminds us that "within the dominant ethos of colonialism., the female sex maintained a denigrated position in the hierarchical structure" (152). Leith-Ross mentions that "after colonisation and independence, African societies continued to subject the colonial gender- sex identities to further pressures and constructions across the continent" (35). The post-colonial state remained largely patriarchal and unreconstructed. In addition to reproducing the logic of colonial oppression, it formulated converging constructions of sexual identities, this point to the fact that sexuality became an instrument of power between both sexes. The patriarchal post-colonial state empowered masculinity over femininity, which accounted for the perception of female bodies as commodities.

As we see in the texts, this power conflict extends to the females who become defiant of the patriarchal structure that cocoons them. The women regain power from their experience as

prostitutes. The dream of independence becomes the motivating factor that propels them in their trade. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, this journey to independence begins with their recognition of the *bottom power* they have to sever ties with their past, especially from Dele and the excesses of Madam. Ama admonishes Joyce, "you might not have asked for this, but this is what you got. That's life. We don't always get what we bloody order. Forget Polycarp. Be the best worker you can be, make your money, and do whatever else you want to do" (129)! Elsewhere we see Sisi planning her independence with Luc Tomorrow,

Sisi told herself, she would go back to Luc and tell him she was ready to quit. They would go to the police together, and she would be a free woman. She suddenly felt weightless, as if the decision had rid her body of a physical burden. She leaned against the door, securely locked against the world, and raised a fist into the air.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" she whispered in triumph. She looked at her bed, dressed in the white sheets Madam for some reason insisted upon, raised her eyes to the picture on the wall, whispered "Yes" again, and said to the room, as if addressing a Sisi who was separate from her, "Tomorrow it will be all over. Tomorrow you shall be free. Sisi will be dead." She could already feel the taste of freedom rush into her mouth, intoxicating her into a rapid dance that pirouetted her round and round the room until she had to stop to catch her breath (146).

The women are first commodified by the masculine bias pervading the texts, and then commercialized into prostitutes for the sexual pleasure of their clients, and pecuniary gains of their benefactors. But as *On Black Sisters' Street* accounts, the women grow from this experience into becoming strong, fulfilled and independent women.

## 5.2 Conclusion

In concluding our analysis, it makes critical sense to aver that these texts are repositories of the cultural memory of the postcolonial woman caught in an oppressive system. This memory is one blighted by the consequences of racial and gender oppression that has impounded her flight to independence and fulfillment. However, the picture is not all gloomy. In *Images from a Broken Mirror*, the narrative takes a moral pedagogical route in the repudiation of prostitution.

In its concluding page, an address by Mrs. Eki Igbinedion, leader of a Nigerian delegation to Italy to the women is signatory to this puritanical view. She says "it is a wrong decision for anybody to decide to take to a shameful profession in order to make money. Because, in the course of it you would have lost something that no amount of money can buy ... You would lost your purity, your pride ... your you" (122). In a similar view is Papa's admonition to his son, Carlo:

Poverty is not a thing of the pocket; it is a thing of the mind. These girls are not the only ones from their country. If you go down to Roma you will see many young, beautiful Nigerian girls in the convent studying to become Reverend Sisters or those working in tomato farms at Napoli. So, if someone chooses to resolve her economic problems by taking to the streets, there is definitely something wrong and abnormal (121),

This belittling posture is also reminiscent of Victorian attitude towards prostitutes. Aspinall writes that "the prostitute is the 'fallen woman' personified, often pushed into this profession through the inability to gain work, poverty and circumstances, she is made into a social and moral pariah by society" (17). The text captures the grim life of prostitutes, who are hounded and

harassed every day, whilst propositioning trade with their clients. In the text we see a bizarre ritual take place:

In a short while, Peace, whom Grace had invited to help her, entered. They locked the door firmly and commenced the ritual. The girls, except Efe and Buki, were told to remove all their clothes. Grace, with the help of Peace, carefully collected small portions of hairs from their heads and pubic areas. They tied them differently according to their owners, and told them that after their monthly periods they should, each, submit a blood stained pant. All these were to be used to invoke calamities on any of the girls who failed to pay up her debt or involved the madam in any police problem (58).

The text is explicit in its aversion to prostitution as a degrading social enterprise that subjugates women, another institution favoring patriarchal and masculinist sentiments. None of the girls survive the experience. Efe, the lead character exits the stage to accept her fate in Nigeria. Regarding the socio-cultural placement of prostitutes, Dominguez Garcia claims that:

Their bodies can be defined as "grotesque" in the Bakhtinian sense of the word, because they are the victims of sexual exploitation and of man's -the coroner's- exploration and inspection after death. They lose their identities as women under patriarchy, and their corpses are examples of "the utmost of abjection," following Kristeva's notion (54).

Nonetheless, she argues that prostitutes can be seen "both as sexual victims and sexual agents, introducing the idea of performativity" (55). This idea is very clearly expressed by Judith Butler's words in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*:

For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the anticipated agency, of a female "object" that inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position. The radical dependency of the masculine subject on the female "Other" suddenly exposes his autonomy as illusory" (22).

And this is the case with prostitutes and other women who try to become "visible." For, as Susan Bordo states, "women's bodies can be defined as "texts of culture," that is, "different bodies are assigned to different locations, are represented differently in prevailing cultural codes, and are accorded different authority as producers of knowledge" (23).

As a consequence, women play an active role in the construction of their identities and challenge dominant representations in respect of different categories such as "ethnicity," "gender and sexuality," and "disability." They have a say in what can be considered as "normal" in the process of globalization in which they are taking part (Nick Stevenson, 4). Women can then build their identities in a post-positivist fashion, as "theoretical constructions that enable us to read the world in specific ways" because "in them and through them, we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, we give texture and form to our collective futures" (Satya Mohanty 43). So, we have to talk about "feminist praxis in global contexts," that is, contexts that involve a change in cultural relations from the local, regional, or national level to the world.

We see this positivistic approach to feminist issues play out in *On Black Sisters' Street*, where a different interpretation prevails. Prostitution is presented as an institution for empowerment and growth. Through it, women can gain ownership of their bodies. Hence, it is noble. The girls, Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama accept their fate with a gusto and determination to

make it. They do. They gain strength from their collective struggles as prostitutes and forge ahead to greatness. This passage in the text summarizes their sisterhood: "Sisi is dead, and all Madam can think of is business. Doesn't Sisi deserve respect? What are we doing? Why should Madam treat us any way she wants and we just take it like dogs" (155). They bind together as a means to survive:

We're not happy here. None of us is. We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals. 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 here. There are always people looking for causes to support. They can support us. We can be free. Madam has no right to our bodies, 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 death is for business. I don't know what will happen to us, but I want to make sure Madam and Dele get punished." Joyce pulls at the tip of the cloth hanging from the waist of her trousers. Ama impatiently lights another cigarette, then squashes it into the ashtray immediately. She is crying. "Come here," she says to Joyce and Efe. She stands up and spreads her arms. Joyce gets up and is enclosed in Ama's embrace. Efe stands up, too, and puts one arm around each woman. Their tears mingle, and the only sound in the room is that of them sniveling. Time stands still, and Ama says, "Now we are sisters." The women hug one another tight. Years later, Ama will tell them that at that moment she knew they would be friends forever (155-156).

Prostitution in the text is not deprecating, but empowering and fulfilling. They take pride and delight in satisfying the longings of their clients. However, the motivation remains their dreams

for independence and fulfillment. This becomes a platform that commands all their zeal and zest. For Sisi, "apart from that one man with a toupee, she had never received a single complaint. She had more than paid her dues, and now she could reclaim her life, and by Jove she would. She would get rid of Sisi, let a fire consume Sisi, char her, and scatter her ashes" (147).

As prostitutes, they hold out fantasies for the men who visit them. Aspinall recalls that "whilst prostitutes were seen as morally depraved, for the Victorian man the use of prostitutes was widely acknowledged as a way to vent their animalistic sexual desires ..." (70). Recounting Joyce first tryst with a client, the text humorously records:

That night she lay on the bed, legs clamped. How could she spread her legs for someone she did not know? She tried not to think about her mother, because she did not want to see her mother cry. She lay there and remembered the men who raped her and squeezed her legs tighter together. The man with a limp, whose face she refused to look at, thought it was all an act, part of her trick. He gushed. "Oh, I like. I like it. Very much. Just like being with a virgin. Tight. Tight. Tight! Many women. Many. Numerous. But nobody do it like you." His gush became orgasmic. "I like! I like! I like! I like! Ahhhhhhhhhh!" He marked her out and became a regular, nicknaming her "Etienne's Nubian Princess" (126).

For Sisi, hers is maturation from naive and shy to bold and confidence. We are told:

So when the men came, Sisi smiled and flattered and complimented. She tried to make them forget they were paying her to say those things, to do those things, like Madam said. But she never lost sight of the reward at the end of every shift.

She purred:

Yes, big man, I shall take that.



Of course, big man, I shall hold it out for you.

An enema? Most definitely.

Come to me. Come to your little sweetie pie.

Come to your kitty. Your little pussy cat.

When they wanted a French kiss and were willing to pay for that extra, she delivered it with the appropriate ahhs and hmms, forcing herself to obliterate the face of the man she was kissing. Even when, as it often did, her stomach churned, she stuck at it, her tongue in a stranger's mouth, their saliva mixing. *Make him forget he 'spaying you for this bit of tenderness. Make him forget that you don't really care.* She held their head in her hands and arched her neck. No matter what service she delivered, her smile of straw never snapped. It stayed firm. Strong. Unmoving. A rock (147-48).

The point of power is linked to the desire for independence that sustains them in their work.

Independence therefore becomes a collective symbol for their aspirations. It drives them against the pains and blisters of prostitution to the heights of the fulfillment and transformation they desire. For them, their beautiful black bodies are a means to an end, an end that places them above the squalor in their homelands, and dependence on the masculine figures that had crossed their paths. They pay off their debts. They become rich. They become independent empowered women. This is the message from the text sex becoming a liberator (a source of growth), and not just a pleasure too or an economic asset.

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