



Double Dilemma of the Female Immigrant: A Psychoneurotic Reading of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* and Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo*

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Abstract

In this paper the authors examine the precarious lives and vicissitudes of five migrant African young girls who sought for a better life in Europe. The impossible squalor, war, hunger, child abuse and sexual exploitation, deprivations, and the nondescript existence thrust upon them by the African dysfunctional landscape, family in some cases, and leadership generally, all coalesced to force the young girls to desperately and acutely embrace the option of escape to Europe as a panacea to their misery. Beyond the veneer of plain character plot, the authors seek for the subterranean explanations for character development in the two texts by Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* and Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo*. This they have identified in the psychoneurotic interpretation of characterization in the texts.

Key words: Psychoneurotic, psychosis, neurosis, disorder, migrants, medical humanities.

Introduction

Criticism of African women's writings which started from the mid 20th century demonstrates a vigorous response to the creative output by many celebrated African women writers. The rise of critical opinions on African women writings has occasioned the employment of feminist theories in the analysis of such works. This kind of criticism elicited an almost erroneous impression that women's creative works ought to be subjected to feministic interpretations. The notion that women's writings have to be analysed from feminist perspective resulted in the controversy that saw some literary foremothers denouncing the concept of feminism or redefining their brand of feminism. Buchi Emecheta once lamented, "I chronicle the happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so, I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist, then I am an African feminist with a small f" (553). Reacting to the reading of her works by Katherine Frank and subjecting the works to the tenets of radical feminism, Flora Nwapa declares: "I don't think I'm a radical feminist. I don't even accept that I'm a feminist. I accept that I'm an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows" (16). Thus, the views of these women writers are at variance with those of the critics who read their works

through the lens of feminism. The dispositions of Emecheta and Nwapa presuppose that there is a paradigm shift between the first generation writers' denunciation of being read as feminists and their third-generation counterparts who according to Chielozone Eze "have been unabashedly feminist" (2). She reiterates that "Unlike the generation of women before them; they embrace feminism without apologies" (2). Despite the increasing affirmation of the feminist reading of African women's writings, other critics have continued to explore different ways of reading these creative outputs. Our goal here is to examine the novel to foreground the fusion of the medical terms psychosis and neurosis with a view to exploring the emerging field of medical humanities and migration discourses.

Central to the discourse in this study is the term *psychoneurotic*. A 'psychoneurotic' analysis of literary texts is an extension of psychoanalytical criticism which dwells on the mental state of the characters of a text. In this study, the mental state of the female immigrant characters in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* and Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo*, would be considered. The paper is an exploratory study in which African literature merges with science, forming a scientific fusion of psychology, African literature and medical phenomena. This

lens of interpretation is employed to create a fresh understanding of female immigrant portrayal in *On Black Sisters Street* and *Eyo* vis-à-vis events that culminate in the creation of the characters and to unravel the nuances of meaning embedded in the texts. This study assumes that an in-depth x-ray of the psychology behind the female migrants' portrayal in the novels creates a ground for appreciating attitudinal changes in the characters within the boundary of the novels. Thus, this exploratory reading of Unigwe's and Sanusi's *On Black Sisters Street* and *Eyo* respectively, intends to open a fresh approach to psychoanalytical criticism through the 'psychoneurotic reading model', thereby adding to the existing models of psychoanalytical criticism.

Towards a Psychoneurotic Analytical Model of Criticism

Gary Tucker notes that the term psychoneurosis originates from the Greek word 'psyche' meaning soul, mind, or breath, while 'neurosis' is derived from the Greek term 'neuron' meaning 'nerve' with the suffix '-osis' referring to an abnormal or diseased condition.(n.p.). Tucker further explains that 'psychosis' has come to mean that a person has lost the essence of life and has come to develop a private view of the world or a private reality not shared by others. One evident character of a psychoneurotic patient is that the individual exhibits a disturbed sense of reality and a disorganized personality. A characterizing symptom in such people shows some forms of hallucinations and delusions. A hallucination is a sensory perception experienced only by the affected person. For instance, persons experiencing hallucinations may hear a voice telling them to jump into the river, but no one else can hear this voice. Delusion on the other hand is a belief not credible to others, but has some link with the person's past. For example, as Tucker observes a "casually religious person who is experiencing a psychosis may suddenly begin to tell people ... he has been selected by God to perform some special task"(1). These behavioural traits characterize a psychoneurotic person.

Furthermore, the term 'neurosis' was coined by

the Scottish doctor William Cullen in 1769. According to Sean Dyde, 'neurosis' was also used by psychoanalysts to describe a mild psychological problem which affects the nervous system (223). Neurosis became most influentially defined by Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts over a century later. Freud as quoted by Rolf Lindgren defines neurosis as "being manifestations of anxiety producing unconscious material that is too difficult to think about consciously but must still find a means of expression" (n.p.). Hence, repressed events, disappointments, or traumas manifest later in life as psychoneuroses.

Anthony Badalamenti writes that the fusion of neurosis in psychoanalysis was influenced by two great literary theorists in Psychoanalysis, Freud and Jung.(1). Although both scholars disagree on what creates neurosis, Freud sees neurosis as rooted in early disappointments or traumas, particularly in childhood. Jung, on the other hand, believes that neurosis is simply marked by exaggerations of what would otherwise be a normal expression of the self. According to Freud's belief, in order to unravel a character's behaviour in a literary text, the reader must focus on the character's past; however, Jung objects to this view claiming that such focus will only resonate in self-pity as it is not really a desire to effect change. Natasha Sims observes that, for Jung, neurosis is most effectively analysed when there is a paradigm shift from the characters/patients' past to the present, with a focus on what the character was avoiding in the present (n.p.). Sims summarises that neurosis occurs when certain unconscious desires, which will not be denied, and which dare not find practical outlet, force their way from the unconscious. And when the ego blocks it off defensively, the result of this internal conflict is neurosis. On the other hand, psychosis occurs when, in the process of repressing unconscious desires, the link between the ego and the external world is ruptured and the unconscious begins to build up an alternative delusional reality. (n.p.)

For the purpose of this paper, both Freud's and Jung's views are adopted as a means of investigating character disorder in the selected texts and its implication for unravelling the attitudinal

dispositions of the female migrants in both novels. This choice of fusing both approaches is justifiable as the present does not exist in oblivion but it is superimposed on the confines of the past. In other words, characters may reveal different personality traits separated in time and space, but juxtaposition reveals several layers of interplay of the 'past and present'. Agreeing with this submission, Margaret Dunn submits that such interplay is as a result of the "recurring human experience" (55). Psychoneurosis is a minor mental disorder characterized by inner struggles and disturbed social relationship. Writing on the view of Louis Rudolf Brun, Cheryl A. Logan affirms that in humans, "psychoneuroses seemed to constantly increase in strength. Even when initiated by childhood taboos, internal inhibitions could pervade virtually all aspects of someone's life". (7-8). Psychoneurosis is thus, a psychological problem that develops when neurosis begins to interfere with the normal functioning of an individual character, manifested in symptoms such as anxieties, delusions, hallucinations, ego, defence mechanism, disorganized speech, and behaviour disorder among others. In this study, the psychoneurotic interpretation of the chosen texts will be restricted to the behavioural disorder of the major female migrants in both texts: Sisi, Ama, Joyce, Efe and Eyo.

Disorder

Metaphorically, a disordered mind is said to have turned from the East. Such a person has incidentally lost their reckoning of socially accepted truths. However, it is evident that situations, circumstances, and groups could determine what is acceptable or otherwise to them. This is why 'disordered' in this study has been used sometimes synonymously with deviance, as well as concerning mental state or rationality and irrationality. It is imperative at this point, nevertheless, to draw a distinction between disorder and deviance and establish the reason for using them synonymously most of the times.

Generally, disorder characters are supposedly victims of one psychological problem or another. They are assumed not to be in control of their actions, but unconsciously engage in actions that are

inimical to harmonious existence within their environment. They are supposedly the neurotic who Freud argues are possessed by their self-cloned fantasies. Deviance on the other hand may be different from disorder because a deviant may not necessarily be a victim of disorder. Little Craig opines that if a person's behaviour violates the written laws or widely shared understandings of what constitutes rule breaking, then that behaviour is categorized as deviant (3). Both disorder and deviance may fall within a category but while disordered minds may be completely oblivious of their actions, deviants do what they do as a matter of choice. The deviants' activities may elicit negative reactions from members of their society, but those activities may not constitute problems to them as individuals.

For instance, alcoholics, drug addicts, rapists, fanatics, homosexuals, lesbians, and prostitutes are categorized as deviants because they deliberately engage in their individual acts. Their actions are disorder and abnormal nonetheless. On the other hand, such psychological states as mental imbalance, schizophrenia and madness can be classified as disordered, since the victims have no choice in what happens to them. But because they cannot function harmoniously within their societies, they are also deviants. In other words, all disordered behavioural traits are regarded as deviance, but not all deviant behavioural traits can rightly be regarded as disorder. However, such behavioural traits are so called in this study because they upset social harmony and sometimes, forces which the affected persons are ignorant of often propel them to take those deliberate deviant decisions and actions.

Disorder may not be an established literary or even psychological concept though writers have attempted to create characters that conform to its nature. It emerges as characters struggle to overcome the problems emanating from their environment and as they experience the vicissitudes of life. In portraying literature as a mimetic of life, writers create characters that reflect reality, in their serenity and in their chaotic livelihood. Both male and female writers create characters who at one time

or the other in their lives feel 'out of sorts' with themselves in their societies. Such male writers as Africa's Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Kofi Awoonor, Wole Soyinka, Teju Cole, Bessie Head, Helon Habila, Toni Kan, Hisham Matar, Stephen Simm and others capture the disillusionment of post-independent African societies in their novels. In *Fragments, This Earth, My Brother* and *The Interpreters* these writers: Armah, Awoonor, and Soyinka, respectively create characters who as a result of their disillusionment with their respective societies become alienated from their societies and subsequently disoriented, being no longer in harmony with their societies. Most of Ngugi waThiong'o's major characters are always faced with conflict situations that force them to take certain actions that seem irrational to others. Such major characters' actions may be viewed as disordered by those who have been negatively affected.

In the African-American society, novelists like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison among others create characters that engage in deviant behaviour resulting from the effects of slavery and racism. Even beyond the colour bar, novels like George Elliot's *Mill on the Floss*, Jean Rhy's *Wilde Sargasso Sea*, Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (to mention a few) represent different manifestations of disordered behaviour in their major characters.

Manifestations of Disorders

A disordered character feels 'out of sorts' with himself or herself and cannot function harmoniously in the society because of peculiar behavioural traits. Disorder in such a character could reveal itself through outright mental imbalance, in which case the character may be described as insane. Such a character may also exhibit regressive behaviour; become unnecessarily aggressive, unusually subservient, or over-dependent on others in such a way that such characters' mental balance becomes questionable. Disorder can manifest itself through sexual perversions; through the tendency to be assertive in society; by withdrawing from society; or through

sadism or masochism to name but four.

Freud believes that the basis for psychoanalysis is to make us understand why a person with sound eyes and ears can see and hear in broad daylight things that are not present (schizophrenic hallucination), why another person suddenly thinks he is being persecuted by the people of whom he has hitherto been most fond of, or puts forward the cleverest arguments in support of delusional beliefs which anyone could see were nonsensical (26). In this study, disordered behavioural traits are exhibited in various ways by the female migrants in the novels being studied, hence perpetuating their double jeopardy. The instantiations of disorder examined in this study are rooted in neurosis and psychosis, hence psychoneurotic.

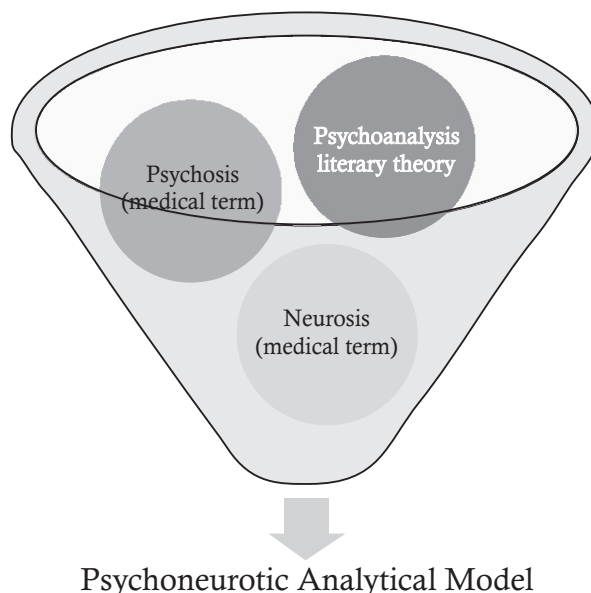


Figure 1: Integration of Psychoanalysis, literary theory, Psychosis and Neurosis

'Psychoneurotic' as a term is a mutual overlap between psychoanalytical criticism and psychosis/neurosis with interest in the mental state of characters. This convergence is illustrated in Figure 1 above which is a schema developed by the authors of this paper. The rationale for adopting a unifying term is to integrate all the variables the mental health expert and psychoanalytical critics are

concerned with in their fields of study. The convergence of the variables in Figure 1 thus gives rise to our 'psychoneurotic analytical model'. Following this model, the study aims to establish that having an expanded psychoanalytical framework would aid us to have a better and deeper understanding of the dispositions of Unigwe's and Sanusi's projected female migrants in the novels. An Igbo proverb affirms that *Adiro akwu ofuebe enene nmanwu* (One does not stand in one place to watch a masquerade). Therefore, employing this new lens of reading will add to other earlier interpretations of Unigwe's and Sanusi's novels.

Exploring the world of *On Black Sisters Street* and *Eyo*

On Black Sisters Street, like every 21st century work produced by African women writers, tells the story of the excruciating pains of double-yoked victimhood; first a sexualized body and second, a commoditised body due to economic deprivations in the African continent – a situation synonymous with the living conditions in most developing countries. The story that resonates in this novel depicts the plights of four fleeing female migrants; Sisi, Ama, Efe, and Joyce, all of African descent, who work as commercial sex workers in Belgium. Their journey into the Belgian landscape began on the premise of more lucrative lifestyle, which Europe the continent of their colonizers promises. Faced with the harsh deprivations (political, socio-economic, laurels of war, starvation, ethno-religious intolerance, rape, poverty, and corruption) in their African continent, these female migrants see Europe as a glorified promise Land, flowing with milk and honey. They have the illusion that as soon as they are able to reach this God-given land, all their deprivations first as women, and second as Africans, would disappear.

Eyo, narrated in the third person point of view, recounts the dehumanizing experiences of a trafficked 10-year old girl in Europe. Her childhood dream is to be armed with education so as to escape the abject poverty and squalor that characterized her daily life in poverty-stricken Africa. Her dream becomes a mirage as she becomes a victim of human

trafficking and child abuse. Sanusi's novel exposes the inhumanity enshrined in modern-day child sex-slavery and exposes the deceptions that lead young African women into cross-border slavery. The novel is also replete with motifs and imagery of abject poverty as characterised by the graphic description of Ajegunle, similar to Egys's *Sterile Sky*.

In this paper therefore, we raise questions that evoke a beyond-the-surface reading of the female characters: what is the underlying premise for their migration? How does their plight depict the African continent? How does this reveal the writers' core argument on migration and its effects on women, first as object of their sex and secondly as African citizens?

African Women's Writing and the Migration Discourse

Migration has become a topical concern for scholars, government and non-governmental agencies globally. As obtainable in other global issues, African women writers and literary critics have taken to their pens to add to this global uprising, thus making it a major thematic preoccupation of discourses in African literature of the 21st century. African women writers such as Chimamanda Adichie, Chika Unigwe, Taiye Selasi, Abidemi Sanusi and NoViolet Bulawayo have taken turns in recording their concerns with respect to migrant African women. Their reactions to the global dilemma extend the preoccupation of African literature beyond the blinkered national issues which early generation of writers were occupied with in their works. Narrating the anti-utopian experiences of African migrants, a situation created by the forces and process of globalization, puts these writers on the pedestal of the preservation of human rights and dignity.

Through a prismatic view of African migrants' experiences, global issues like human trafficking, modern-day slavery and racial discrimination are X-rayed with the aim of questioning the dictum of human rights. African women writers exploring this concern are interested in examining the quality of lives of the female migrants vis-à-vis the place of their (dis)location. Also they examine the internal

and external agents responsible for the state of their lives. Most often what is immediately noticeable in such works is the depiction of the male characters as metaphorical representation of the exploitative African landscape, forces that choked their female victims out of the continent into the waiting arms of an illusionary honey-laced Europe. The women writers of interest to us deploy their creative pieces as artistic arsenal for depicting the indigent conditions which in most cases, lead the female migrants to leave for a location where the grasses are believed to be greener. They also question the conditions the female migrants are subjected to in the land of their flight, hence, projecting a double tragic phenomenon. In our discussion of the novels, therefore, we explore how the female characters display the conditions of a double victimhood through the lens of psychoneurosis and how the resultant effect infringes on their mental well-being and dignity.

African Socio-economic Reality and the Manifestations of Psychoneurosis

As discussed earlier, in *On Black Sisters Street*, Unigwe fleshes out the argument of the commoditisation of African female migrants' bodies in Europe, albeit with the consent of the victims. Egya submits that the "female voice has come of age" (2), hence through their writings they demand justice for both environmental degradation and women and children, who are exposed to the harsh reality of postcolonial African landscape. He reiterates that these female authors "deploy fiction as an artistic strategy for not only historicizing the ecological condition in the region but also for projecting female corporeality from a dimension that couples the fate of the environment and that of the woman." (2). In *On Black Sisters Street*, Unigwe affirms Egya's postulation. The novel details the plight of African female migrants who flee to Europe because of the harsh conditions that characterize their African environment. It chronicles the pain that characterized their pre-flight, their dreams, annihilation and their servitude. It poignantly depicts their exploitation and degradation first as females and secondly as African

migrants. In the novel, Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama are young African women with robust dreams. In a bid to metamorphose these dreams and shove them into reality they willfully accept an offer from a male pimp - Dele - who becomes a benefactor promising them the benefits of ferrying them from Africa to Europe. They are lured into believing that Europe, the land of their colonizers, has the capacity to turn their dreams into reality. All that the land demands in exchange is the merchandising of their bodies. Faced with the African socio-economic imbroglio, and its attendant tragedies of war, corruption, rape, unemployment, and abject poverty, these young African women see the offer to flee to Europe as a messianic opportunity. Sisi (whose real name is Chisom) in her subconscious thoughts, dreams of "leaving Lagos" (17). In her mental state, she arrives at a delusional belief that "*This place has no future*" (17). She imagines that the environment is choky and denies her the right to breathe. The author takes the readers into Sisi's inner recesses and with metaphor and food images from her environment, depicts choking poverty. The author narrates:

She tried to imagine another year in this flat her father rented in Ogba. Walls stained yellow over time – the colour of pap – that she could no longer stand, their yellowness wrapping their hands around her neck, their hold on her life tenacious. She tried not to breathe, because doing so would be inhaling the stench of mildewed dreams. And so in the house, she held her breath (17).

Unigwe's novel delves deeply into the twists and turns of the human psyche. The novel explicitly describes Sisi's fluctuating mental state as she processes their living condition. She is tortured by poverty and finally decides that she must escape her life circumstance—a situation which her father's long held belief shatters. As an only child, her parents had given her their best as they ensured she was educated. Sisi remembers her father's admonitions, "The only way to a better life is education. *Akwukwo* (17). This, however, becomes a mirage as Sisi is

unable to secure this “one-ticket out of the cramped two-room flat” (19) after her university degree. Hence, she becomes emotionally unstable and questions the place of “love as a prerequisite for marriage” (28). Amy Tikkanen reminds us that:

Neuroses are characterized by anxiety, depression, or other feelings of unhappiness or distress that are out of proportion to the circumstances of a person's life. They may impair a person's functioning in virtually any area of his life, relationships, or external affairs... (n.p).

This implies that the overall thought process of a neurotic can be altered by circumstances of life leading the character to take decisions that are irrational. An examination into Sisi's thought process as she decides to quit her long built relationship with Peter and agree to Dele's terms of going to Europe and working as a prostitute underpins this argument. The narrator states, “It was not as if she no longer loved him. She did... But love had its limits. Peter did not have the means to turn her life around...she had given up on love as a prerequisite for marriage” (28).

The narrative rivetingly elaborates the socio-economic conditions and parental expectations imposed on Sisi and goes forth to theorize the interconnectedness of the human psyche and socio-economic status. This description of Sisi's psyche gives readers a clear picture of her character within the context of other events that take place in the novel. Sisi gradually builds an unconscious desire after her conversation with Dele. She remembers his statement, “if you wan' comot from dis our nonsense country, come see me, make we talk” (30). Freud describes “neurotic symptoms as the result of **drives** rising from the id, being repressed by the ego and super-ego, and finding expression in 'displaced' forms” (Lodge 35). Sisi's encounter with Dele leaves an unconscious repressed desire in her, which Terry Eagleton describes as “certain unconscious desires which will not be denied...” (158). The author narrates, “She had no job... the entire economy was in a mess...she knew she could not stand another

year in Lagos. Not like this” (28-9). This inner thought is accentuated by Sisi's firm resolve, “*I must escape*”. All Sisi needs as prerequisite to escape the harsh economic realities is ironically determined by the unschooled Dele and these are in contrast with her lifelong belief. Dele tells her:

“As long as you dey ready to work, you go make am...You be fine gal now. Abi, see your backside, *Kai!* Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest nyansh? Make dem come here, come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for chest, *omo*, how you no go fin' work? (39-40)

Initially, Sisi thinks she may just listen out of curiosity but like Eagleton rightly observes, “psychosis” is diagnosed when “the link between the ego and external reality is ruptured, and the unconscious begins to build up an alternative, delusional reality” (159). This happens when the unconscious is unable partly to repress the wishes and intentions that cannot be actualized. In psychosis, thoughts and perceptions are severely impaired giving way to mental derangement. As a psychoneurotic character, Sisi's emotional distress and unconscious thoughts are in conflict in *the novel and subsequently* are expressed through various physiological and mental imbalances. As pointed out earlier, she questions the place of love in a marital relationship. She takes a decision to walk into modern-day sex-slavery despite her university education. The author states that “she took in his words with calm that assured her she would do as he said. Staying in Ogba was...worse than Dele's proposition” (40). What is worth foregrounding here is the internal conflict that swayed her inner recess like a pendulum. She goes back and forth through her decision process, “But was she really capable of *this?* (41). The use of “*this?*” suggests her disdain for the proposed work; however, the reality of their living condition robs and overshadows her rationality. At this point, sliding into irrationality reflects her psychoneurotic state. The author's voice chides, “There has to be another way. Something else she could do” (41). By dispossessing her of the

will power to take rational decision, the author accounts for the helplessness of Africans in general and African women in particular, who are made to contend with forces that tend to perpetuate their subservience and hold them in master-slave tango. This is one of the major points Unigwe uses to thematise female migration in the novel.

The Challenges of a Dysfunctional Family and Psychoneurosis

The alliance which this study foregrounds between psychoanalysis and medicine paves way for discussing the dislocation of the family and abdication of familial responsibilities as catalysts that induce psychoneurosis. The novel succinctly describes the eroding of parental guidance to Efe and her subsequent descent to a social deviant, a social manifestation of psychoneurosis. Efe was sixteen when she lost her mother; and her father becomes a recluse as he finds it hard to accept his wife's death. He buries his sorrow in alcohol and leaves his children to cater for themselves. Efe, the eldest of four children, is saddled with motherly responsibilities. The children barely eat, hence meeting other needs becomes impossible. With a father who does not care anymore, Efe becomes vulnerable to the advances of Titus, a forty-five year old man, who promises to meet all her needs but in exchange for sexual favours. Efe recalls, "THAT first experience was so painful in its ordinariness that she spends the day wanting to cry" (45). She gets pregnant and is abandoned by Titus who is supposedly happily married. Efe becomes a single mother and in order to eke out a living works at three jobs to give her son a life. Subsequently, she meets Dele who offers her passage to Europe.

Unigwe's deliberate act of associating Efe's moral relapse as a consequence of the absence of a mother-figure speaks volume about the place of family in the African community. In doing so, she depicts the impact of maternal absence in a home setting. At the death of his wife, Efe's father burns up everything that has her memory: "Her clothes and her shoes and her bags and her lingerie. Everything in a huge bonfire" (51). The fire becomes an eclipse to shield the pain and erode the memory of Efe's

mother. It is crucial to point out that this purgative action fails to dull the pain of the loss of the mother-figure. Efe remembers this when she is rejected by Titus and as a result of the carefree attitude of her father. "Her father was in the sitting room, snoring off twelve bottles of lager and fifteen shots of *ogogoro*....she began to cry and want her mother"(55). Unigwe depicts motherhood in African culture and conceptualizes her role in nurturing and building lives. Motherhood as experienced and practised in African milieu is glorified in her sacred roles as caregiver, nurturer, and self-giver, hence the name in the Igbo lore *Nneka*, means mother is supreme. Unigwe deliberately creates a metaphoric male-figure who loses focus and grip on his children because of the absence of a mother-figure cum guiding light. He laments, "God, why did you take my wife? Why? Isn't heaven full enough? What am I to do with four children who still need a mother? Despite the fire, her memory remains and her loss engraved. Longdet submits that "The past is like magnetic remnants of a deleted file or like the imprints of a dinosaur footprint, which cannot be totally erased" (25). Thus, Efe's mother's memory remains and no fire is strong enough to erase it. Kolawole argues that African women's writing does not repudiate the family unit nor does it reject nurturing of life and motherhood. Unigwe paints this graphically through Efe. She does not reject the life growing in her nor will she opt for abortion. It is this decision that makes her vulnerable to the pimp's offer. "She had agreed to Dele's terms before she asked what she was expected to do abroad" (71). Efe finds herself relief at the thought of becoming a sales product of Dele, the human merchant, who owns "Dele and Sons Limited" (71). For her, it means a better life for her son, L.I. She dreams,

L.I. would get a better life, go to good school, 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. (71)

Efe's decision denotes ambivalence at once. On the surface she exudes the innate self-sacrificing nature of motherhood, a position Irigaray sees as controlled by “our phallogocentric society ... founded upon matrophobia”(10). She explains further that such thought process constitutes a robust avenue for creating the “hermeneutics of the repressed”, where the unconscious thought process of the female body is expected to be an oblation in a bid to create a conscious process that forms the basis of the African patriarchal society. Hence, she queries the silence of psychoanalysis to such depiction of motherhood, where her body is commoditized and “sacrificed to form the empire of representation, which privileges the masculine and the human race” (Irigaray 10-14). It suffices to state here that Efe's deviant decision is propelled by the age-long repressed concept which sees the body of the mother according to Stevens “as a *locus* of semiotic-the primal phallus that men steal” (94). On the strength of the conviction of her role as a mother, she permits Dele to steal her body and enslave her as his commodity which will make him 30,000 Euros richer. Dele ensures he sustains his economic grip by threats and consistently states the terms and conditions attached to their servitude. He wields the illegality of the female migrants' status and their debt profile as a control mechanism; hence, they become his prey and he enriches himself by commercializing their bodies.

In presenting the double dilemma of the female migrants, Unigwe, as Eze observes, questions the “moral quandary” of empathizing with a character who is “complicit in her objectification” (92). Yet is important to understand that at the point Efe takes her decision to become a sex-slave, she is manifesting the tendencies of a psychoneurotic due to the effect of repressed emotions and many other risk factors that abound in the African landscape. What occupies her mind is to escape the harsh economic reality in order to fulfill her role as a mother to L.I and become materialistically comfortable. Suffice it to say that this deviant decision she takes turns her into a double tragic figure. She deliberately walks herself into slavery and becomes Dele's property.

The Antecedent of Post-Traumatic Repressed Emotion

According to Freud, in order to unravel a character's behaviour in a literary text, the reader must focus on the character's past. Sanusi's *Eyo* and Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* reveal the effect of memory on the young African women. In *Eyo*, we see heart wrenching traumatic experiences of the child protagonist, Eyo, who is trafficked to Europe by a male relative under the guise of offering the child a better life outside the indigence that characterized her life in Africa. The core of the novel is the vice of child abuse, human trafficking and an attempt to expose the deception that lead young African women into cross-Atlantic modern sex-slavery. The novel is replete with images of abject poverty, which is the condition that leads to Eyo's forceful dislocation to London. While in London, Eyo is first, turned into a domestic slave by Lola and later, she is sexually molested by Sam, Lola's husband. This is sequel to her own father, who sexually molested her from the tender age of eight. The picture Sanusi depicts at once portrays an absurd sexual dysfunction of a paedophile, whose sexual gratification is satiated by violating a child. Eyo's experience is synonymous with Ama's in Unigwe's novel, as she is also sexually abused by her own father at the age of eight. Sanusi and Unigwe describe the torture Eyo and Ama are made to go through, when their fathers began their nightly visits. In *Eyo*, Sanusi narrates:

Her father gave her a gentle shove towards the mat and she lay down on it, determined not to let her tears fall. Woodenly, she took off her nightdress and waited for him. He came towards her and thrust his hips at her. (358)

In an attempt to unravel the deviant resilience Eyo shoves at her exploiters while in London, the novelist takes the readers through the journey of Eyo's past. In describing the import of the past on the present, Isidore Diala writes that “Reminiscences are of course compelling to the extent that the events they recall are momentous or

at least significant or that the personality of the memoirist itself elicits interest” (113). Here, Eyo suffers a post-traumatic stress disorder due to the serial childhood abuse she is forced to endure. For instance, while she was in Nigeria, she endured being constantly raped in order to protect her little sister, Shade. So, in her new location, UK, she develops a robotic personality and stoically bears all trauma. Ligaga opines that “Right from the beginning, Eyo is presented as a young girl child in perpetual risk of male-inflicted violence”(78). It is however worth noting that the violence Eyo was exposed to also exposed females who were collaborators in her bodily violation. These tons of violence turn Eyo into a victim of psychoneurosis as she overtly becomes an unusually subservient and willing tool in the hands of her exploiters.

Unigwe's character Ama suffers the same childhood ordeal as Eyo, and this was the underlying factor that presents her vulnerability and subsequent decision to travel to Europe. Ama is raised in a religious, pious home where the admiration for the colour white is synonymous with holiness. Ironically, this is the same setting where Ama is raped by her father at the age of eight. Like Eyo, Ama is made to suffer in silence. Ama in her delusional state reminisces:

father floated into her dark room in his white safari suit. Ama thought he was a ghost and would have screamed if he had not pre-empted her by covering her mouth with one broad palm and smothering the scream in her throat. With the other hand, he fumbled under her nightdress... That was the first time it happened (113).

Ama's mother is oblivious of the mental torture her daughter is subjected to every night by the angelic incarnate being, her father. Both novelists at this point question the agency of the father-figures who metaphorically ought to be protective, but conversely become synonymous with destruction. This is likened to the African landscape gifted with both human and material resources to give succour to her citizenry thereby protecting them from the

harsh economic condition, but which ironically exploits them thereby accentuating their vulnerability. Eyo and Ama become victims of their perverted fathers. The effect of such sexual exploitation turns the victims to psychoneurotic personalities. Jung as quoted by Sims avers that a replay of the past events triggers psychoneurosis. (n.p.). For Eyo and Ama, if they could be violated by their own fathers in the past, then submitting their bodies to total strangers becomes a bearable less evil.

The female migrants Eyo and Ama at this point become deviants. They deliberately choose to endure the commoditization of their bodies as a means to an end. For Ama it becomes her survival strategy, a wilful decision. This however does not absolve their actions and make them less disordered and abnormal. Eyo suffers a mental disorder close to schizophrenia. At some point, from her home in Ajegunle to the various houses in the UK, she had no choice and absolute control of what happened to her. Her Father, Sam, Big Madame and Johnny are in control. This is perhaps why she develops the robotic personality and loses every sense to function harmoniously within her society. This state of mental imbalance makes her stoic, as her delusional state will always hear her mother's words “you must endure because you are a woman. That is what women do. We endure”(372). Hence, Eyo represses her emotions. It is such deviant behaviour that makes Eyo fight back against the forces that exploit her. For instance, she takes a decision to kill Jonny who has so violently abused her body. Of course she is oblivious of the fact that she is only letting out pent up pains, which seek an outlet through her decision to commit murder. Sanusi, unlike other African women writers who have used the murder metaphor as a tool for liberation, does not permit Jonny to die as he is given a second chance to life. The disorder Eyo manifests here emerges as she struggles with the inner conflict to overcome the vicissitudes of misfortune. Sanusi presents the chaotic livelihood of a trafficked child who is robbed of her human rights and dignity. She depicts graphically, the horror innate in this global space. She presents the conflict situations that culminate in Eyo's resorting to taking what may seem an

irrational decision to liberate herself.

While Ama's and Eyo's childhood experiences offer the reader an opportunity to see their past and how their bodies were violated by their own fathers which led to their traumatic conditions and subsequent sex-slavery, Joyce's post trauma stress stems from a violent past associated with relics of the war-torn Sudan. At the age of fifteen, Joyce and her family are caught up in a civil war in which Janjaweed militia murder her parents and her brother in her presence. She is gang raped and left in a state of unconsciousness. However, she joins the band of refugees as they file down to a displaced camp. Here, while others narrate their horrific experiences as a way of letting out pent up emotions and the gory experiences, Joyce bottles up her story. While in the camp, she falls in love with a Nigerian Soldier, Polycarp. Being a Sudanese, Joyce is aware of her foreignness, but hangs on to the love she has for Polycarp as a channel of healing her horrific past. Polycarp's family is however, unwelcoming and exhibits xenophobic tendencies. This places Joyce in a vulnerable state. As a solution, Polycarp introduces Joyce to Dele, promising her a new start in Europe as a well-paid nanny. Joyce leaves for Belgium and feels completely betrayed by Polycarp when she finds out what she is meant to actually do in Belgium. Later in the novel, she reflects on this betrayal as possibly the worst in her life. Considering everything else she has been through, this sense of betrayal seems acute. Joyce like Eyo is unwillingly lured into Europe under a deceptive guise to work as nanny. However, unlike Eyo who makes an attempt to escape, Joyce takes a decision to remain under the guide of Madam. Entrapped by her illegal status, she succumbs to commoditizing her body. To her, no form of betrayal is worse than what Polycarp has done.

Unigwe and Sanusi identify poverty, domestic violence, rape and war as bases from which all five young African female migrants find themselves in Europe. The motivation for this travel is due to the hopelessness of survival which informed the various deviant decisions they take in order to eke out a living. It is pertinent to point out that all five women hope for a better life. However, none of them is in

control of their own bodies, exposing them to all forms of psychoneurotic manifestations.

Conclusion

As cultural globalization continues to surge and demand new responses, the responsibility of the African writer increases. This includes the need to question the place and dignity of African migrant citizens and their overall wellbeing in the supposed commonality of cross-border migration. Unigwe and Sanusi like other African female writers have theorized the issue of migration and are interested in African women's mental state as they navigate the land of their colonizers.

In the works under study, the female migrants are presented as victims of social perverts like Dele, Femi, Sam, Big Madam and Jonny. These perverts enslave all female migrants through their fake and illegal status and rob them of all the ability to be in control of their actions. Hence, their victims are forced to engage in actions that are despicable and inimical to harmonious existence within their environment such as sex-slavery. These characters are reduced to living self-cloned fantasies and day-dreaming of a futuristic better life when they pay up their debts and gain agency from their slave masters. It is the disillusionment of this status that led Sisi to take a decision to escape. However, this decision is gifted with death. The slave masters are deviants who break immigration laws and traffic the young women through false travel documents, hence perpetuating their servitude as sex-slaves and illegal immigrants. The illegality of the status of the victims as well as the high debt profile of each, keep them in long-term slavery. Hence the reality for the female migrants in both novels is very disappointing as they have to deal with the horror of having sex with strangers until they are able to pay up their debt. Each of these victims mentally prepares herself to withstand the experiences.

In sum, the story in both novels resonates around young African women who while fleeing oppression, meet a worse form of human degradation. Rorty argues that the modern world derived moral healing from the "description of particular varieties of pain and humiliation rather

than philosophical or religious treatise” (192). The situations the narratives present invite the readers to question the agency that grows their economic status at the expense of other humans. Hence, in exposing the wrongs inherent in the society with regard to migration and the devaluation of the female migrant in particular, both writers have taken a step into righting them and subsequently raising people's consciousness to such anomalies. They tend to invite the readers to be less judgmental and embrace empathy, as only such disposition can lead us to set policies that respect every human.

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