

## MODERN SLAVERY NARRATIVES AND IDENTITIES IN DARKO'S AND UNIGWE'S NOVELS

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### Abstract

The last four decades have witnessed mass movements of people from countries of the Global South to parts of Asia, Europe and the West. These movements have been the subject of various studies and have been documented in literary forms. Several of the studies have recognized the independent and autonomous migration of women in recent times for economic reasons. Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2007) and Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) are focused on the black women who are migrating to the West and the problematics of their movements. A plethora of previous studies on the two novels have focused on their gender portrayals and feminist features. Through a postcolonial feminist reading of the novels and scrutiny of their female subjects, this study reveals new identities of black female migrants in the West which reflect the primordial status of women of old African diaspora. These modern slavery narratives present black female migrants as the 'other' and the 'subalterns' in the West who are trafficked, indentured as sex workers and are stripped of their fundamental human rights. However, the black female migrants are presented as being complicit in their predicament owing to the unfavourable, harsh and bleak economic climate of countries of the Global South which drive them to make detrimental and dehumanizing choices. The female subjects of the two novels because of the trade they ply in the West become commodified, exploited and stripped of their dignity.

**Keywords:** migration, black female migrants, African diaspora, exploitation, commodification, postcolonial feminism

### Abbreviations

*Beyond the Horizon*      BTH

*On Black Sisters Street*      OBSS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary migration of Africans to the Western diaspora is one phenomenon expressed in fiction from several perspectives. A major reflection of the current wave of migration incorporates, but is not limited to the following: sex trade, human organ trade and forced/manual labour. The current spate of African migration is a humongous steak with many prospective migrants willing to be trafficked, while some are ready to die in the dessert and the Mediterranean in order to make it to the West. The heavy involvement of female Africans in the current spate of mass migration and the odious and poignant trafficking in humans to the West is premised mainly on the economic realities of many African states. Lilian Acero (2009) observes in a study that conditions of exploitation in the Third World create extreme vulnerability for poor women to succumb to pressure to sell their bodies for sex both in local and international spaces. She goes further by asserting that: "Women who are sold or trafficked for prostitution are seldom from developed countries. Typically, they belong to the global South or to other countries undergoing distressing economic conditions" (29). The female subjects of Unigwe's and Darko's novels lend credence to this assertion as they are from Nigeria, Ghana and Sudan, all countries with bleak economic outlook, and women from poor families and backgrounds.

The independent and autonomous movements of women especially those from sub-Saharan Africa have received the attention of several scholars who all agree that feminized migration is a core dimension of the twenty-first century that needs attention. Studies by Aderanti Adepoju (2000), Hania Zlotnik (2003), Phil Okeke-Ihejirika (2016) and Katherine Donato & Donna Gabaccia (2018) are some of those that have investigated migratory patterns highlighting how women form a significant demography of those who are migrating and how migrant experiences are gendered as they are not the same for male and female migrants. This essentially means that there are certain migration experiences which are gender-segregated.

Anti-Slavery International defines 'human trafficking as the recruitment, harbouring or transporting of people into situation of exploitation through the use of violence, deception, coercion and forced work against their will'. Trafficking in humans involves a process of enslavement and exploitation which may take the following forms: forced prostitution, forced labour, forced begging, domestic servitude, forced marriage and forced organ removal. The organization reports that seventy-two percent of enslaved people are women and girls with a whopping ninety-nine billion dollars in money made annually from commercial sexual exploitation. The staggering amount involved accounts for why human trafficking has become so lucrative and seems to be a hydra-headed problem of contemporary migrations.

Chika Unigwe and Amma Darko are notable female African writers with migration experience themselves and whose novels, *On Black Sisters' Street* (2007) and *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) chronicle the sexual exploitation, objectification and the commodification of the black female migrants' bodies in the Western metropolis. These two fictional works narrate the experiences of diaspora and most especially the harrowing tales of trafficked black women forced into sex work in Europe; they belong to the tradition of feminist novels where women are portrayed as victims of patriarchy but much more as that of globalization. Central to the two novels are the themes of prostitution and modern slavery. Rather than treating the sex workers who are the protagonists of the works as fictional stereotypes who are deconstructing cultural and patriarchal hegemonies as done in previous African literary works with same theme; Chielozona Eze ('Feminism with a Big 'F' 2014) and Charles Marfo, Philomena Yeboah & Lucy Bonku (2015) are of the opinion that Unigwe and Darko have presented the reality of their protagonists and their otherness in the global sphere. Using postcolonial feminist term of 'otherness' and Gayatri Spivak's concept of 'subaltern' as analytical terms, I argue that the contemporary black female migrants of Unigwe's and Darko's novels are reflecting the same identities as black women of old African diaspora. The aim is primarily to establish that slavery is not a phenomenon of the past after all and that Article 4 of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights outlawing slavery may not hold in respect of trafficked and indentured black female sex workers in Europe. In relation to the assertion raised here is the need to look at how the black female migrants are made to negotiate new identities when they come face to face with imperial culture and with their rights subverted. In contextualizing and putting the identity alteration of the black female migrant in the West in perspective is the need to interrogate prostitution as not just any other job but one that confers no employment rights on the victims. The situation of trafficked black female migrants is such that migration alters their identities while their repugnant trade, prostitution further compounds it.

Apart from Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (OBSS) and Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (BTH), some other contemporary works that have fictionalized the exploitation and commodification of the black female body in the Western diaspora are: Bisi Ojedian's *A Daughter for Sale* (2006), Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Ifeoma Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2009) and Ikechukwu Asika's

Tamara (2013). In all of these fictional representations of reality by both male and female African writers is the portrayal of the black female migrant as a victim of the male-controlled sex industry in the global sphere. This is very much an affirmation of the situation of a postcolonial woman being a victim of double colonization – colonialism and patriarchy wherever she goes or finds herself.

## 2. TEXTUAL DISCUSSION

### 2.1 Expressions of Exploitation of the Black Woman's Body in Unigwe's *OBSS* and Darko's *BTH*

That Darko and Unigwe write within the feminist literary tradition is not in doubt as they both engage with salient issues pertaining to women and have through their novels *BTH* and *OBSS* exposed the lives of many black female migrants in the West. Writing their novels initially in German and Dutch, languages of their hosts, places them within the literary traditions of those countries. This is quite significant considering the languages are not their mother tongue (L1) and neither their second language; the impression then is that the texts are not for mere entertainment but to spur authorities in Germany and Belgium to action and by extension the entire world on the issue of modern slavery. These two novelists have taken the charge by Gayatri Spivak (1988) that "intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's 'other' (66), they have taken up the challenge of representation – 'speaking for' ('Darstellung'). In the two novels are representations of the black female migrants' exploitation in the West.

The female subjects of the two novels because they are desperate to escape poverty and improve their lives acquiesce to be trafficked under false identities. Darko's *BTH* has Mara, Vivian, Kaye, and Comfort while in Unigwe's are four female sex workers: Efe, Sisi, Alek and Ama, women who have been transported to Europe by Senghor Dele under false identities and with the imposition of thirty thousand euros on each victim. The traffickers arrange for travel documents and finance the process so the trafficked arrive the West as debtors. Before their relocation to the West, the black female migrants are the muted 'other', and upon arrival in the West, their false identities make them invisible, powerless and devoid of any human rights.

A look at the backgrounds of the female subjects in the two novels attests to their vulnerability. Aside the economic challenges in the home countries, the four sex workers in *OBSS* are picked deliberately to reflect poor backgrounds and to represent different strands of the same narrative. Sisi, a university graduate is the most educated of the lot, but she faces difficulties in securing paid employment after graduating; Ama is a victim of sexual abuse in the hands of her pastor step-dad; Efe at a very tender age has a child outside wedlock and Joyce, formerly Alek, represents someone from a civil war background, a victim of violence and rape; and her inclusion is to put an African colouration to the experience. Even the choice of names of the sex workers reflects the regions in Nigeria that are heavily involved in trafficking in women - the South East and the South-South.

Seemingly similar to the situation of the four protagonists of Unigwe's *OBSS* is that of Mara, Vivian and Kaye of Darko's *BTH*. Mara, the protagonist of the novel has a name that Roger Asempasah & Christabel Aba Sam (2016) consider as one that summons a biblical discourse which explores the vulnerability and migrating subjectivity. Their claim in "Reconstituting the Self: of Names, Discourses and Agency in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*" is that the name Mara alludes to the biblical book of Ruth 1:19 hence its connotation of bitterness. Mara comes from such a poor background that the father gives her away in marriage in exchange for animals, clothes and bottles of Gin. She is no way less vulnerable in the city that she moves to after marriage as the living condition she is subjected to is that of abject poverty. Vivian and Kaye are also from less fortunate backgrounds hence their acquiescence to be trafficked under false identities.

The exploitation of the trafficked women in the two novels transcends their bodies but incorporates all facets of their existence. In his 1994 book, *Colonial Desire*, Young discloses the desire of the white man for the black woman's body right from the colonial period. He exposes how the colonial authority in Southern Rhodesia (Now Zimbabwe) enacted an Immorality and Indecency Suppression Act in 1903 prohibiting sexual intercourse between an African man and a European woman. When European women agitated for the extension of the Act to relationships between their men and African women, their efforts met a brick wall. Young establishes the sense of entitlement of white men to black women's bodies right from colonial period; a notion that is still seen to be fueling the demand for black prostitutes in many European countries.

Jennifer Hallam (2004) in "The Slave Experience: Men, Women, and Gender" presents the sexual exploitation of the black woman during slavery and identifies it as a significant factor differentiating the experience for males and females. The white man's claim to the slave's body, male as well as female, was

established during slavery according to Hallam. By this assertion, the exploitation of the black woman's body predates the colonial era. Some other claims by Hallam are that: the exploitation during slavery began right from the auction block where captive Africans were stripped of their clothing, oiled down, poked and prodded by potential buyers; the African woman was seen as hyper sexual and object of the white man's abhorrence and fantasy; within the bond of slavery, masters often felt it their right to engage in sexual activity with black female slaves. Some other bizarre claims are that masters also raped their married female slaves due to the inability of the husbands to protect their wives from such violations and the fact that the master's control over both spouses reduced the black male's potential for dominance over his wife. There was also the possibility of some female slaves acquiescing to their masters' advances for the possibility of fair and preferential treatment or so they could be liberated. It is thus evident that both slavery and colonialism have reduced the black female body to an object of fantasy; and the unfortunate narrative is that some contemporary black female migrants do not fare any better than their unfortunate ancestors of old African diaspora captured and forced into slavery.

Unigwe's protagonists are the modern equivalent of slaves who are in the West to satisfy the fantasies and lust of men. They are anonymous due to their false identities, and to use the narrator's words, they are the "Unmourned. Unloved. Unknown" (OBSS 39). They are for long silenced to submission and the three surviving prostitutes are only able to tell their stories following the murder of their compatriot, Sisi. The murder proves the catharsis for them to get their stories out; stories presented in kaleidoscopic manner with the juxtaposition of the past and current experiences and also a hint of future events. Mara of *BTH* is presented as a pawn in the hands of men in her life: her father, husband and even her pimps. Her voice is appropriated both in Ghana and in Germany. She plays no part in the choice of her husband; when she is brought into the city, Akobi batters her into submission; and even in Germany she is instructed to remain mute. She goes through all experiences without being able to react until it dawns on her that the reason she is in Germany is not for love or to fulfil a promise made to her by Akobi; and that the proceeds from her sex trade is used by Akobi to maintain his mistress, Comfort and towards building them a home in her Ghanaian hometown.

Undoubtedly, the exploitation of the black female subjects is best projected in the amount of money slammed on them by their pimps. Dele makes it clear to the ladies that they will remain his slaves until they pay him a sum of thirty thousand euros each, the cost of bringing them to Europe. On landing in Europe, their passports get confiscated until their debt is defrayed via a monthly payment. At the time of Sisi's murder, she has been in Antwerp for eight months; Efe has spent almost seven years and hopes to get manumitted within two years while Ama has spent almost six years in servitude. What this means is that by the time Efe attains freedom, she would have spent nine of her productive years serving Dele; a whole nine years spent sleeping with countless number of men on a daily basis. Joyce is about the only sex worker with lesser time of servitude as Polycarp, her Nigerian lover, who rescues her from the refugee camp in Sudan; but later succumbs to pressure from his family not to marry her pays a significant part of her debt.

In Darko's *BTH*, the fate of Mara, Vivian and Kaye seem not to be different; more harrowing is the realization that their husbands/lovers merchandise their bodies for sex with proceeds paid into their men's accounts. Mara is blackmailed into prostitution by her husband and never handles any money accruing to her from her exploitation. Even when she is able to escape his hold and transfers to another pimp, Oves, he takes thirty per cent of her earnings. She is made to pay the homosexual who marries her to secure a residence permit a sum of fourteen thousand and six hundred deutschmark, with a further demand of two hundred deutschmark monthly for two years. Vivian narrates how money she makes from sex trade goes into financing her lover Osei and his German wife, Ingrid. Kaye, the sex worker turned wife of the white brothel owner and pimp, even after being married to him for six years is made to do much more than grooming green horns, she is "still partly in the trade, [...], when time and interest allowed"(116).

Exploitation of the black women in the two novels is also expressed in the commodification of their bodies in the West. Although prostitution is not totally uncommon in most societies, the debauchery of the act and the debasement of sex workers in the West leave them totally stripped of any dignity. The women are displayed in show glasses as objects with this rendering them soulless, voiceless and subjugated. Sisi's experience in her display window is narrated thus:

She learned to stand in her window and pose in 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 at the 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 flesh,

mesmerising them, making them gasp and yearn for a release from the ache between their legs; a coffee-coloured dream luring them in with the promise of heaven (*OBSS* 237).

In reference to a prophecy given by a woman that Sisi's future is a bright one, the narrator sarcastically likens the brightness to the light decorating her window where she is constantly "waiting for buyers to admire and buy" (*OBSS* 246). The object that is admired and bought in this instance is the black female migrant's body. All the sex workers in *OBSS* are made to do an average of fifteen men a day in order to pay their fair share of rent for the house on the Zwarte Zusterstraat, the rent on the Vingerlingstraat (the work place) which amounts to five hundred and fifty euros a week and Dele's five hundred euros a month. What this clearly shows is the sex workers' commitments covering their accommodation in Zwarte Zusterstraat, that of the Vingerlingstraat, the work accommodation (the brothel and windows that are used for luring customers) and the money that goes into liquidating Dele's investment on them.

In a manner reminiscent of chattel slavery outlawed almost more than two centuries ago, the narrator of *OBSS* presents the auction of black female migrants in Brussels in this quote: "The women would be called into the room one at a time for the buyers to see and admire. They would all have numbers, for names were not important. Their names would be chosen by whoever bought them. Names that would be easy for white clients to pronounce" (278). Efe, Ama and Joyce while discussing Sisi's death reiterate that they enjoy only the patronage of white men as black men in that environment do not have money for such indulgence. In actual fact, if there are no patrons, then the traffickers will have no incentive to traffic young and vulnerable women to Europe for sex trade.

The narrator of *OBSS* in a somewhat sublime manner that points to the commodification of the sex workers deploys the use of mercantile jargons in many instances. In response to Efe's question on whether she is going to be involved in cleaning job abroad, Dele retorts "No. Sales" (82). Efe in referencing the use of the word 'sales' says "She would be Dele and Sons Limited's export" (82). All the men who patronize the prostitutes in Unigwe's novel are referred to as customers and they are said to move from window to window trying to make "up their minds to close a sale" (178). The sex workers themselves are always "in front of the glass showcase, strutting in sexy lingerie, lacy bras and racy thongs to attract customers" (178).

Darko's depiction of the commodification of Mara, Vivian and Kaye is no less touching. Right from the opening pages, readers are assailed with the debasement of Mara by Oves, the shortened form of overseer as she refers to him as "my lord, my master and my pimp. And like the other women ....., I am his pawn, his slave and his property" (3). Mara's excitement at the possibility of travelling to Germany makes her rationalize that she would succumb to being sold just as her jewellery and clothes to actualize the European sojourn. And of course, she gets her wish as she eventually gets her body merchandized on getting to Germany. In another instance, when Osei takes Mara to Vivian his girlfriend's temporary accommodation in Hamburg, he simply says to her: "This here is Akobi's bundle" (71). And on hearing being referred to in such a mercantile term, Mara ponders: "Bundle? Yes I heard right! Bundle it was he referred to me as. And now, I thought, what next?" (71)

## 2.2. Identity Change of Unigwe and Darko's Female Subjects

Although Bahareh Bahmanpour (2010) posits that "subjects of diasporas are snared in a process of transformation and repositioning of new identities – identities which are always in the process of becoming and transition but never complete" (45), for the trafficked sex workers, their new identities go beyond change through the processes of assimilation and acculturation. The new identities presented by the sex workers are greatly influenced by the kind of trade they ply in the West. The notion that identity as a concept is nuanced by defining personal and behavioural traits, and pointing to group, race, and culture that an individual belongs to is deemed right. While defining the identity of any individual, the race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, gender and even lived experiences all play a great part. Identity in a global world is now relational and "no longer shaped exclusively by geography or blood, or culture understood in oppositional terms" (Eze 'Rethinking African Culture' 234).

Renaming some of the female characters in Unigwe's novel renders those affected anonymous and devoid of any right in their new environment. A person's name is a significant part of his/her identity as even within a family or the larger social structure; the name is helpful in distinguishing one person from another. In actual fact, in some cultures and religions, names are believed to play a great part in a person's destiny. Mara the protagonist of Darko's *BTH* is a name that alludes to the biblical story of Ruth whose mother-in-law, Naomi canvassed to be renamed Mara to reflect the loss of her husband, sons and all possessions in a foreign land (Ruth 1:19-21). Darko's choice is deliberate as it reflects Mara's bitter experiences in the hands of Akobi,

her husband turned pimp and other agents of patriarchy both in Ghana and in a foreign land; the name equally connotes her loss of identity based on her experiences in both local and foreign spaces.

Sisi, one of the protagonists of Unigwe's *OBSS* is born Chisom but renames herself as a way of conforming to the life ahead of her in Belgium and alluding later to "a stranger yet familiar" (44) person that she is to become. The narrator informs readers that on getting to Europe, "she would no longer be Chisom" (28). Her anonymity is also confirmed after her death while being mourned by the three surviving prostitutes when it is revealed: "Nobody knows Sisi's real name. [...] Not these women gathered in this room without her. And not the men who shared her bed, entangling their legs with hers" (36). Once Sisi lands in Belgium, she is set up for an asylum application at the Belgian Ministry where she assumes the identity of a Liberian fleeing war as instructed by their chaperone, Madam. Sisi finds out to her chagrin and helplessness that in Belgium "Not only would she be Liberian, in the next months she would be other things. Other people" (121).

The only protagonist without Nigerian root in *OBSS* is Joyce but born Alek. Her birth name according to Dele sounds "too much like Alex. Man's name. We no wan' men. Oti oo. Give am woman name" (230), so she gets rechristened "Joyce. Yes. Joyce" (230), a name that sounds jolly to Dele. With the promise of a nanny job in Belgium, Alek fails to ask "why she needed a change of name to be able to babysit children" (231), she just acquiesces like the others rechristened. When a passport is eventually procured for her, she is given the full name - Joyce Jacobs, her nationality - Nigerian and her place of birth - Benin City; all contrived national identity markers. It is assumed that Efe and Ama are made to retain their names as they are simple names which can be pronounced by anyone. The identity change of contemporary black female migrants is affected by renaming and at a deeper level connoting total subjugation. This is very much a throwback to slavery period where slaves were rechristened by their masters and resistance by the slaves as in the instance of Kunta Kinte in Alex Haley's *Roots* resulted in battery to submission.

The black female subjects in Darko's *BTH* and Unigwe's *OBSS* have been transported to Germany and Belgium with false and contrived identities/documents. Mara's foray into Germany is during the East/West divide, and once she gets to East Germany with Osei, the trafficker contracted by her husband, an anonymous man emerges with a new passport for her entry into West Germany. Ostensibly, Mara never has an entry visa into the then West Germany hence the use of another black woman's passport. The procurer of the passport tells her that using another woman's identity is possible because "In German people's eyes, [...] we niggers all look the same. We don't fight with them about it. We use it to our benefit" (*BTH* 59). Vivian is another black female migrant in *BTH* who has been brought to Germany through same illegal route and same would have been Kaye's experience. Unfortunately, all the women have been shipped to Europe with fake identities hence they are branded "persona non grata" (*OBSS* 182) by Madam. She quips unemotionally to Sisi "You do not exist. Not here" (*OBSS* 182). This sums up their status in Belgium - they are unknown, anonymous and invisible because their entrance is not legal and so, "Silence and total obedience" (*OBSS* 120) is demanded of them; they are to be seen but not heard. This is very much the reality of postcolonial women whose voices have been silenced according to Spivak.

Transformation of the identities of the black female subjects of the two novels is beyond name change and assumption of false identity, it reflects in their psyche, emotions and the professions by the characters themselves. Darko's novel opens with the protagonist, Mara staring at herself in an oval shaped mirror and seeing a new person, she says: "I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! - what is left of what once used to be my image" (1). The perception of a new self comes after years of prostitution in Germany, years that have rendered her "So friendless, isolated and cold" (1), and with the confession of her own complicity in her reality: "I've used myself and I have allowed myself to be too used to care any longer" (1). The many years of merchandising her body in the West is one she claims have not rendered her emotionless, but in actual fact may have, because she does not nurse the hope of ever returning home and not even the thought of her sons can make her extricate herself from the sordid deep which she has sunk into. By the end of the novel when it is revealed that not only has she been a sex worker, she has featured in pornographic films and has become hooked on hard drugs, she laments: "there's nothing dignified and decent left of me" (*BTH* 140).

Vivian's emotional affect is not totally different from that of Mara in Darko's *BTH*; she gleefully announces to Mara on being prodded about where she has been: "I have disappeared" (128), which is taken to be both physical and metaphoric. Not only has she decided to relocate to Chicago with a GI named Marvin, she has chosen to become an international sex worker in order to finance Marvin's drug use which his income cannot afford. Vivian announces without shame to Mara that "I got a profession that I can practice in every corner of the world. Can you give me a better formula for happiness?" (130). Their degenerate existence in the West makes Mara conclude that: "I am no longer green [...]. As for the morals of life my mother brought me up by, I

have cemented them with coal tar in my conscience" (131). It is a new identity that she acknowledges has been as a result of being blackmailed into prostitution by her husband. Mara affirms that the rot is too deep for her return to her old self. It is a new Mara who is ready to do anything no matter how debasing to make money, she says to Kaye "I am going to do the films and stage the shows and all there is to it. But I want every pfenning of what I make to come to me" (131). The films in this quote refer to pornography. Mara makes this notation of her new identity: "I, illiterate Mara, had turned into a modern woman, body and soul: a caricature pseudo-Euro-transformation that brought with it its caricature pseudo-high feel. I feel a new me" (55). It is a new identity that makes her a slave to Akobi, Pompey or Oves; all agents of patriarchy and it is equally a new identity that strips her of the dignity and virtues which African women are identified with.

Through the presentation of the thoughts and pronouncements by her four protagonists, Unigwe makes readers aware of their identity change. The novel, *OBSS* begins with the acknowledgement by the character Sisi that "She was already becoming someone else. Metamorphosing"(1). The use of the word metamorphosing, a biological term is chosen deliberately and references the observable changes in migrants' identity; an identity that Bahmanpour posits is never fixed but always evolving and betraying several influences. Even if there are other job prospects opened to the ladies, Ama feels comfortable being in the sex trade because of the money it fetches. She has no problem being some other people's slave and merchandizing her body, she says: "But in which other job do you earn money just for lying on your back? Heaven knows there is no way I can be any of the other alternatives open to us here" (114). She owns up to the responsibility of her choice, she surmises: "I was given a choice. I came here with my eyes wide open" (114). The reality of the sex workers is their seeming disintegration with the possibility of becoming completely new persons. Madam of Unigwe's *OBSS*, a significant member of the trafficking network, breaks the myth of African female solidarity by the way she treats the four sex workers. She is not only presented as cold and mean, she is given to the practice of always burning incense, a practice that may have arisen due to the need to ward off the spirit of Sisi and countless other ladies whose lives have been snuffed out of them for wanting out of servitude. She confesses to Sisi in *OBSS*: "This place changes you" (117).

Efe's transformation is the most shocking of the protagonists of Unigwe's *OBSS* as she mulls the idea of one day owning girls of her own after her freedom from the shackles of Dele and his network. One would have hoped that she will not want other ladies subjected to what she has experienced, "rationing out fantasies twenty-five minutes at a time" (87) and doing an average of fifteen men a day in order to pay off her debt to Dele. She makes good her promise as she buys her own girls at an auction after nine years of servitude to Dele. In its predominant kaleidoscopic narrative style, there is a bit of foreshadowing as readers are presented with snippets of future causes of the surviving prostitutes. At a prospective prostitutes' auction in Belgium, "Efe would buy numbers five and seven. Number five because she smiled easily. Number seven because she looked docile and eager to please, the sort of girl who was grateful for little" (279). Efe comes full circle becoming a madam herself, a case of an exploited becoming an exploiter.

Cultural paradigm and imperatives are also shifting in relation to new identity of the black female migrants in the two novels. The mothers in the novels are deemed to have failed for not being there to nurture their children. Mara of *BTH* says material things are all she can offer her sons while Efe of Unigwe's *OBSS* also shatters the myth of motherhood as a nurturer by not being there to raise her son. The assumption here is that, no amount of money or material things could compensate for the absence of a mother in the lives of her children. There is no mention of Ama and Joyce getting married and having children after gaining freedom in *OBSS*; this very much may be a disavowal of African societal expectation of a woman. The sex workers in the two novels trade their freedom in African space to that of slavery in the global sphere in their desperate quest to migrate to the West

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

New identities of the sex workers of Unigwe's and Darko's novels point to primordial status of blacks generally of old African diaspora. The female subjects of the novels are socially constructed as exotic women in the West; they are victims of patriarchy represented by male characters like Dele, Segun, Akobi, Osei, and Oves in the two novels; and who enjoy the support of women at times in propagating their hegemony and hold, a position reinforced by the chaperone of Unigwe's protagonists, Madam. The black female subjects of the two novels are considered objects of fantasy of the imperialist; a conception since the period of transatlantic slavery. This study establishes that the primordial status of black females of old African diaspora is still the lot of their contemporary counterparts. The female subjects of Darko's and Unigwe's novels are modern equivalents of old slaves who find themselves as bondswomen of agents of patriarchy and globalization in some European countries. While slaves of the old African diaspora were forcefully taken, the female subjects of Unigwe's and Darko's novels are yielding voluntarily to overtures by pimps aided by the

lure of a better life in the West.

While sex workers operate in African and diasporic spaces, the level of debauchery of black prostitutes in the West is not only mindboggling but one that completely erodes the dignity of black female migrants caught in the act. The female subjects in Unigwe's *OBSS* and Darko's *BTH* have found themselves in Belgium and Germany out of their desperation to migrate which has been capitalized upon by agents of patriarchy who are men and in some cases spouses/lovers of the women themselves. If the four protagonists of Unigwe are privileged to an inkling of the kind of life that awaits them in Europe, they probably would not succumb to the lure of migration. Mara, Vivian and Kaye, all black females in Darko's *BTH*, have no disclosure of the kind of life they will lead in Germany; that accounts for why Mara does not mind Akobi selling everything they own to finance their sojourn in Europe. The three women are forced into prostitution by their husbands/lovers to make money for themselves; thereby denying the black female subjects rights over their own bodies. While the sex workers in Unigwe's novel are slammed with a charge of thirty thousand euros before they can regain freedom, the ones in Darko's have the proceeds from their services paid into their men's bank accounts.

In the two novels are female subjects who have traded their freedom in home countries for a life of servitude and lewd living in the West; they are commodified and are referred to in mercantile terms. The sex workers in Unigwe's *OBSS* are displayed in glass windows striking obscene poses to lure 'customers' while the ones in Darko's novel are even forced into drugs and pornography. The identity change of contemporary black female migrants is one that exposes their otherness in the West, women from former colonies who are disintegrating physically, emotionally and even culturally and are becoming completely new. In the two novels are black females objectified as black sex workers, conferred with an anonymous existence in a new and hostile environment, stripped of their fundamental human rights in the West and thus cementing their subalternity. While sex workers do have pimps too in African space, they are not in any way slaves to such pimps and they have opportunity of opting out of the trade anytime they choose to do so. An attempt by Sisi of *OBSS* to break free of her bond after falling in love with a white man results in her death. Although her white lover, Luc, is ready to pay off her debt to Dele, the agents of patriarchy will not have that as it may lead to revolts by others; and to serve as a deterrent to other sex workers, she is killed. And at death, she remains anonymous and is denied justice for her murder.

For the novelists, their efforts have been more or less an acknowledgement of the need to change the narratives of modern slavery. In Uchechukwu Umezurike's (2005) opinion, the efforts by Darko and Unigwe put them in the mold of "writers whose narratives confront patriarchal oppression and demonstrate quite evidently through their female characters a resounding feminist position in how women must reconstitute their subjectivity from subaltern positions; positions of disadvantage and subjection" (153). The onus is on the concerned women to say no to the lures of wealth and a 'supposed' good life in the West at the expense of their dignity.

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