

The Dynamics of Economism and Human Trafficking in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and Ifeoma Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh*

Anthony Ebebe Eyang and Augustine Edung

Department of English and Literary Studies

University of Calabar

Calabar - Nigeria

Eyangtony36@gmail.com

+2347030473247

Austinedung89@gmail.com

+2347062981562

Abstract

This paper examines the reprehensible activity of human trafficking and its creative representation in the emerging literary repertoire of the current dispensation. Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' street* and Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh* present an uncensored account of the evils involved in the trading of humans for any form of sexual or physical exploitation at the detriment of the victims' lives, careers and dreams. Both novels are analytically critiqued with the New Historical approach to criticism as well as with significant allusions to Marxism and Feminism. The authors here, through an artistic handling of the subject of trafficking, have succeeded in drawing attention to the fact that human trafficking leaves the victims physically, psychologically and emotionally ruined. As such, they have fashioned both texts to canvass for all and sundry to put an immediate end to this societal menace.

Introduction

The trafficking of humans for whatever form of exploitative labour—physical, sexual, military, etc—is a heinous violation of human right and a reproach to all affected societies. Ezechi Onyerionwu compares it to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, adding that it qualifies as “a contemporary global siege” (20). The activities of trafficking, inglorious and dehumanizing as they are, have for a long time been carried out surreptitiously, leaving a vast majority of the world's population in the dark about its nature. Patricia Odukwu comments on the secrecy involved in the acts: “Human trafficking is clandestine in nature and is carried out in most cases unnoticed and not indicated as a criminal network” (3). The actors in this criminal enterprise have inflicted great pains on society and humanity, while they seek wealth and twist dreams and people's lives and aspirations, most times without being noticed. But in recent times, this menace has gradually been uncovered by writers,

human rights activists, government agencies and international organisations. The efforts put in by these individuals and groups have yielded enormously in unearthing the schemes, structures and stratagems of the traffickers and their loathsome deeds.

It is worthy of note that this human trade, trafficking, modern day slavery or whatever name it is called, does not just occur without purpose. A lot of factors co-mingle to facilitate or necessitate it: sheer greed, poverty, war activities, environmental disasters, the natural longing for migration, corruption and political disillusionment, unemployment, among others. These social, economic, political and environmental factors enhance the schemes of the victimizers (the traffickers) and heighten the susceptibility of the victimized (the trafficked). Here, most of these factors will be surveyed under the encompassing subject of economism.

Economism, which simply denotes the placing of excessive primacy or value on economic benefits, cannot be divorced from the misadventure of trafficking. Economism relegates other societal elements of morality, culture, integrity, communality and love, placing emphasis on economic returns and materialistic cravings. When not in check, it can be responsible for most crimes and violent acts that bedevil humanity. In approaching the discourse of human trafficking from the viewpoint of economism, a bi-dimensional mode will be taken: its manifestation on the part of the traffickers on the one hand; and its position in the lives of the trafficked on the other.

African literature in the contemporary era has towed its path to an array of social, political and economic upheavals in the continent and the larger world. In this decade, human trafficking has come under the literary spotlight. Bisi Odeniran's *A Daughter for Sale*, Akachi Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* (2008), Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (2009), Abidemi Sanusi's *Eyo* (2009), Ifeoma Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh* (2010) and Ikechukwu Asiba's *Tamara* (2013) engage this smoldering issue. Though written by different authors and the stories told from diverse perspectives, these works are united by two things—tenacity on the part of the writers and the desire to manumit these victims through literary exposure of their ordeals. The injustices they suffer, hitherto concealed, have been laid bare before all. Revealing this evil becomes the first step towards curbing it, while the writers express their noble vision for society.

The increasing narrative focus on this problem by emerging voices in African literature underscores a salutary development—a rededication of literature to the exploration of critical issues of the time. This exploration is in tune

with the social ideology of the writers, which is to stand with the marginalized and exploited, and deplore injustice and other forms of social malaise.

In this paper, specific concern is on Chika Unigwe's and Ifeoma Chinwuba's *On Black Sisters' Street* and *Merchants of Flesh* respectively. The former text views the sex trade from the Belgian destination, while the latter tells a similar story from the Italian side. In any case, the trafficked girls are transplanted from Africa, mostly Nigeria. Hence, the reader shuttles between the African (mainly Nigerian) and European settings in the course of flowing with the narratives. And their stories are the same: overwhelmed with agony, nostalgia, regrets, loss of identity, unimaginable exploitation, psychological and emotional tragedy, and so on.

The analysis is hinged on Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism to closely examine how history, politics, culture, socio-economic conditions and relationships, religion, language and other elements within the two novels co-mingle to make meaning. It will account for how the authors have assembled this mélange of elements to tell the story of the oppressed and to campaign for a society free from the sinister activities of human trafficking. As it has already been established here, aspects of other theories such as Feminism and Marxism, are also called to their analytical tasks.

Synopses of the Novels

Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* bares the experiences of four girls (three Nigerians and a Sudanese)—Ama, Sisi, Efe and Joyce. These girls fall under a trafficking network headed and funded by a Lagos-based Nigerian, Senghor Dele. Dele is described as "the common denominator in their lives" (113). They are lured from Nigeria, amid different social, political and economic circumstances, to Antwerp, Belgium. Ama, having been violated sexually on repeated occasions by her stepfather seeks a different destination in the wake of her exposure of the erotic saga perpetrated by the man she calls father in the ancient town of Enugu. She moves first to Lagos where her path crosses Dele's and her travel to Belgium takes root. Sisi (called "Chioma" back in Nigeria) is disillusioned by her state of unemployment and the poverty staring her family in the face. To her, her boyfriend Peter, a school teacher, shows no prospects of dreaming big, nor does he seem able to take good care of her if they end up in marriage. Sisi encounters Dele in a salon and this contact (as is the case with the other girls) results in her travel to Belgium which she and her family consider to be

a fulfillment of the prophecy made by a clairvoyant woman at her birth. Efe, in her teenage age is forced into sexual ripening by a man, Titus, who exploits her sexually after having lured her with money, gifts and promises. She gets pregnant in the process and is immediately jilted by Titus. Efe feels abandoned in an icy world. She births a son Lucky Ikponwosa (simply called "LI"), and sulks almost all the time about her inability to cater for his needs. She meets Dele by chance and his schemes are just enough to convince her to want to go abroad.

The arrangements for Antwerp are made which she embraces with euphoria; Belgium promises a better life for her and her little boy LI. The last, Alek later turned Joyce, is a victim of the disastrous civil war in Sudan. Her entire family is slain by rebel soldiers—five of whom rape her in turns. Ravaged and doomed by the misfortune, Joyce finds herself in a refugee camp where she falls in love with a Nigerian soldier, Polycarp, on a United Nations peace-keeping mission. He promises to erase her sad past; and truly, he is just able to make Joyce feel the life ruined by the war begin to resurge. Their romance is shattered almost as soon as it begins when Polycarp takes her to Nigeria and his mother stands against their union, swearing that her son would only marry a foreigner over her dead body. Polycarp is forced to take Alek to Dele as compensation for the betrayal. This sets Alek on the cruise to Antwerp, but not before she takes up a new name, Joyce. In the historical town of Antwerp, the girls become sexual objects –advertised in open windows; sexually brutalized and forced to work even when the weather is extremely severe. They are left with no second choice, being in an alien, faraway land and under the ever-watchful surveillance of Madam. Sisi, hard as she avoids it, falls in love with a white man, Luc, which is the beginning of her undoing. Disgruntled by the nature of her 'job', Luc beseeches Sisi to quit. Sisi gives it a thought and decides to leave the trading of her body for good. She thinks quitting can be as easy as it sounds: her death at the hammer of Segun (Madam's secret executioner) bashing her skull is enough to prove Sisi wrong. Sisi's death stuns the other girls gravely, mingled with the bitterness that is brought upon them by the fact that Madam is not in any way concerned about her demise. It serves as an eye opener to them that they mean nothing, and that their lives only matter for the economic proceeds.

On the other end of the literary compass, Ifeoma Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh* explores the trafficking of Nigerian girls for sex trade in Italian cities. And like the case in Unigwe's text, Chinwuba artistically displays the network of facilitators of this evil, home and abroad. The prologue that kick-starts the story pictures the tragic remains of a street girl, who might have been a

victim of a hit-and-run crime. Her identity is shrouded in uncertainties, but it is incontestable that she is a casualty of trafficking from Africa. Her fatality hints at the nature of the lives of the trafficked overseas, which the reader comes face to face with.

Faith, a young woman in Benin City is the protagonist here. A ward-maid at a local clinic, a university drop out and a single mother, Faith has three mouths to feed—Osas, Uyi and Ovie (the first being her nephew and the two others, her daughters.) Faith lives in the least salubrious of places with others who share poverty in common. Thus, she craves for a change for a better life. In the turn of events, she meets with Lizzy Johnson, a young woman whose appearance betrays her financial buoyancy. Lizzy offers Faith the prospect of a dream life in Italy where she would amass boundless wealth from fruit and tomato-picking. Faith, who should see the incredulity in this idea, is rather blinded by the sound of Italy, of Europe, which she considers an end to life's miseries. The travel arrangements are made as Faith puts her girls in the care of her mother. The journey to Italy is preceded by an oath-taking under compulsion, in which Faith and other girls vow to pay back the money spent on them by Lizzy to the last coin. Though this signals danger, Faith's mind is made up and there is no turning back. In Italy, she realizes that Lizzy has tricked her: there are no fruits, nor tomatoes to pick; Lizzy is no longer friend as she has transformed to a mean, cold-faced Madam Lizzy. Prostitution (for which she has originally been sponsored abroad) becomes Faith's only resort. The pain of this betrayal is worsened by the unimaginable debt Madam Lizzy has imposed on her (and others) to offset before being freed. Faith works for a while before becoming conscious of the exploitation they are subjected to. As a result, she stages a rebellion with a number of other girls, and backed by the church mission led by Don Lorenzo, an Italian friar. The revolt yields as it ends in the arrest of Madam Lizzy and other madams who exploit a thousand other girls. Freedom takes its place as the girls will try to pick back whatever pieces of their lives they can muster. This triumph nonetheless comes with its price: Lovett, one of the rebelling prostitutes is killed; Faith's mother and Faith's two daughters are also slain, back in Nigeria. Chinwuba seals *Merchants of Flesh* with an epilogue in which an agent of trafficking in Nigeria is set ablaze by an irate mob. This mob action, though a deserving punishment for the heinous crime of trafficking, reveals the cruelty of jungle justice, which is fast becoming an index of our challenged society. The author uses this to drop a side comment on the barbarity of jungle justice which lacks moral justification and which is regrettably becoming the order of the day.

Artistic Representation of the Agony of the Trafficked

Human trafficking, as creatively dealt with in the two novels, is shown to be evil, with Unigwe and Chinwuba calling for its immediate confrontation by society. The authors project this challenge to be requiring urgent an intervention as it is portrayed as a thing which saps life from the victims, leaving them with haunted souls.

The trafficked in both novels are ruined severely. Some end tragically. We have it that "Many girls have not come back. The clients kill them and dump their bodies in the bush" (*Merchants...*, 240). Those whose lives are spared go on to suffer physical and psychological damage that will follow them to their graves. To add salt to wounds, the traffickers "make huge profits from their misery" as Evelyn Uyama and Chukwuka Nwachukwu put it (123). *Merchants of Flesh* shows us a group of girls who are frustrated beyond measure and are on the verge of resigning to fate. One of the girls, Leila, does not fear being dead, she even craves for it as long as it is capable of ending the curse of exploitation and the execrable violation of her human rights. Her speech conveys the physical damage she suffers:

Which life? Is this a life that we are living?
Me, I want to get the disease and die. This
is not a life.... I am tired of this life, this
suffering. Look at me. Not yet twenty-five
years old and I am looking like sixty. Is this
a life? (152)

Truly, there is no dignity in this sort of life. Repeated sexual encounters with different men kill the emotions of these girls, leaving an ugly scar on their psyche. The agony of these hapless victims displays itself to the reader in a graphic, uncoated manner. Sisi, in Unigwe's novel, is led to an early death. Her death in turn makes the other girls to realize their own vulnerability. They realize what it actually means to have been trafficked, that it deprives one a fair place and that one's existence has its essence attached only to the money it pours into the purse of the man or woman in charge of their accursed lives. Sisi's 'sisters' in Antwerp, who are every minute bound to share the same fate, are the only ones to mourn her, the only ones to feel the hurt of losing a loved one. They understand the pains they have to go through on the streets; they understand what it means to lose one's identity and dignity of self. This death becomes the only thing that binds them; it also

gives them the premium opportunity of sharing their personal stories and their past lives. Their own propensity to end like Sisi is made clear, in this way:

Sisi's death brings their own mortality close to them. The same questions go through their heads. Who is going to die next? To lie like a discarded rag unnoticed on the floor? Unmourned. Unloved. Unknown. Who will be the next ghost Madam will try to keep away with the power of her incense? (39)

This more or less points to the maliciousness of human trafficking as it makes nonsense of the human life and destiny. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) refers to human trafficking as "a crime that shames us all" (1) and goes on to statistically breakdown this reproachful activity:

...the most common form of human trafficking (79%) is sexual exploitation. The victims of sexual exploitation are predominantly women and girls. Surprisingly, in 30% of the countries which provided information on the gender traffickers, women make up the largest proportion of traffickers. In some parts of the world, women trafficking women is the norm. (4)

The last sentence above brings women's victimization of fellow women to the centre of discourse, which further interrogates feminist agitations. African feminists such as Helen Chukwuma, Buchi Emecheta, Grace Okereke, Henrietta Otokunefor, Mary Kolawole, Chioma Okpara, among others, have at various points prescribed the concept of female bonding as a reliable weapon of response against patriarchal terror. Opara for instance, summarizes this concept where she aptly states that "Women provide sturdy pillars for one another to lean on in adverse moments" (34-35). And to think that women would have the courage to lure their fellow women into this calamity is not only offensive to feminist sensibilities, but also a sheer failure on the part of humanity. Susan Arndt considers such women to have a "shared responsibility for the discrimination against and oppression of women," going on to label them "handmaidens" and "custodians" of

patriarchal powers (119-120). Thus, the authors have campaigned for the dire need to put an end to this peril. They present trafficking in their respective texts as an act which mocks us all in the most delirious of ways and which impedes individual and collective advancement.

There is also the irreparable loss of identity which goes hand in hand with the ill luck that rocks the trafficked. The girls are compelled to assume new names, new roles, new lifestyles, new images; thus stripping them of their identities. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Chisom becomes Sisi, Alek becomes Joyce, and so on. Their original identities are given up and they are coerced into wearing new selves suitable for the unedifying life ahead of them. This loss of identity, especially in Sisi's character is pictured by the author, thus: "Sisi. Funny how she had started to call herself that, even in her thoughts. It was as if Chisom never even existed. Chisom was dead. Stuffed out. A nobody swallowed up by night" (101-102). With this loss of identity comes an even bigger loss—a loss of dreams, of aspirations, of future desires. Joyce's one-time dream of becoming a medical doctor is crushed (243); "Ama... gave up her dream of going to the university.... Now...she...thinks of becoming a pop star" (244); Efe dreamt of becoming a successful writer (242). All these beautiful dreams are thrown away, only to be painfully substituted by the shameful, stigmatizing, precarious career of road-side prostitution.

Economism Versus Human Right

Economism takes the centre stage in this discourse. It erodes the fundamental rights of the trafficked girls in the narratives. The perpetrators of this atrocity are a grid of men and women who only consider what profit that can be made at the expense of their victims. The trafficked girls are denied their right to liberty and freewill and coerced into a shameful career of prostitution. Economism confronts human rights in Madam's utterance to Sisi where she says: "Now you belong to me. It cost us a lot of money to organise all this for you" (*On Black...* 182). She proceeds to seize Sisi's passport, stressing that Sisi would not get it back until she pays up the outrageous sum Madam claims to have spent on her. Faith experiences a similar violation of human rights in *Merchants of Flesh* when Madam Lizzy denies her food after Faith's long flight and subsequent arrival in Antwerp. Despite Faith's inanition, Madam insists on her signing a document that binds her to a debt of forty-five thousand dollars, which must be paid back to the last cent.

In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, this economic exploitation and human right violation reflects in the characters of Senghor Dele in Nigeria, Madam and Segun—both in Belgium. They form a criminal network that lures and hoodwinks young girls with any available mechanism. They are ready to make the girls' lives miserable, denying them the right to life and freedom, unless they comply to their greedy demands. In Chinwuba's *Merchants of Flesh*, this system is in (Madam) Lizzy Johnson, Igrigidinta (the juju man) and Idahosa. They build enviable reputations and empires on the misfortunes of others. The most they care about the girls is how beautiful they look, how sexually attractive their bodies are—all driven by economic prospects. In *On Black Sisters' Street* this is seen where Dele takes an assessment of Sisi's bodily endowments, as the author presents:

You be fine gal now, *Abi* see your backside, *kai!* Who talk say na that Jennifer Lopez get the finest yash? Make them come here come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for chest, *omo*,.... He fixed his eyes, moist and greedy, on her breasts. (43).

These self-indulgent traffickers do not think about the physical, psychological and emotional damage inflicted on their victims. Madam in Unigwe's novel shows no whit of uneasiness regarding Sisi's death as conveyed by the portion below:

Nobody says it but they are all aware that the fact that Madam is going about her normal business is upsetting them. There is bitterness at the realization that, for her, Sisi's death is nothing more than a temporary discomfort. They had watched her eat a hearty breakfast, toast and eggs chewed with gusto and washed down with a huge mug of tea, and thought her appetite, her calm, tactless. (39).

The girls are like objects, never to be mourned when they die, to be used and replaced after expiration. In *Merchants of Flesh*, the same is the case, as Cynthia, an enslaved sex worker laments: "We are prostitutes. We are not worth a kobo. People can kill us and go free.... We, our lives are nothing"

(151). This reveals a more or less predator-prey relationship between the traffickers and the trafficked. Suzette Grillot remarks that “The economic benefits for the traffickers are tremendous and the suffering for the trafficked is incalculable” (1). The traffickers have it all to benefit while the trafficked live a life forever scarred by the fangs of sexual violation and a loss of self-value. Joyce further reveals this in her monologue:

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?.... 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. (290)

Economism on the part of the trafficked also has its take here, under the harsh climate of political disillusionment which Nigeria (as well as continental Africa on the larger scale) continues to sink into. Decades upon decades after independence, there is hardly any improvement, nor advancement of the lives of the people. Unemployment crisis continues to worsen, thereby leaving a large portion of the masses to think a way out—crime, migration, and so on. Unigwe bares the failure of the Nigerian democratic government and the hardship which it eternally brings, as: “We thought we were suffering under Abacha. This is worse! At least a military dictatorship did not hide under the cover of democracy” (90). Corruption is directly mentioned further ahead in the text where Polycarp chips in: “All our government is good for is stuffing their pockets. They don't care what happens to the people they're supposed to be ruling” (214). Chinwuba's *Merchants...* re-echoes this failure of the political class in a more pictorial manner. Through the conversation between faith and Lizzy Johnson in Nigeria, a lot of inadequacies are revealed:

Our people are so used to suffering that they cannot imagine a better life elsewhere.... What of ordinary water to drink? If rain does not fall here, some of us will not be able to catch water to

drink.... Where I used to live, ... an infant crawled into a deep well dug in the yard for water. One of the tenants who went to draw water brought the baby's corpse in his pail. Can you imagine that? In the twenty-first century? People are still depending on well water.... The government can try but it will require a lifetime to put things right in this country" (52-54).

These harsh conditions pictured above are the end product of corruption, betrayal and marginalization of the masses on the part of the leaders. Therefore most people seek the nearest route out of the country. This is responsible for the vulnerability of the characters in the two texts as we see them hankering to travel to Europe which promises better living conditions. By longing for Europe and the grimy lucre it promises, these characters are ready to trade their human rights and submit themselves to be oppressed. Ezechi Onyerionwu comments on this:

For the average African today, the other side of the Atlantic, especially Europe and the Americas, have become choice survival destinations dangling promises of a good life, and it hardly matters if some kind of slavery is part of the entire package. (8)

Faith in *Merchants of Flesh* is delirious at the prospect of travelling to Europe and so are the girls in *On Black Sisters' Street*—Efe, Ama and Chisom. They are antsy at the mention of Europe, believing that propitious times lie ahead, and feel ever anxious to run away from the poverty they face in Nigeria. Parents also share in this blame as they fail to ask proper questions about what their daughters will be doing abroad and in whose care they will be. Instead, these parents have their eyes fixed on the hard currencies and gift items that will be sent to them by their daughters. They consider it that having their daughters abroad will make them more respected in the society. Faith's mother for instance is economic and she is ready to back her daughter with spiritual powers as long as a good fortune comes out of the journey. She tells Faith:

Remember us. Do not let us die of hunger.... But do not forget that our people too have power. When you reach the white man's land and you need something, I am here. I may not be able to give you money but I can get you any juju you need whether for love, money, protection. (94)

Sisi's parents in *On Black...* are just as overwhelmed as Faith's mother. But contrary to expectations, as is mostly the case, the girls get to Europe only to realize that it is really not what they had expected to see. They find out that the opportunities there are exaggerated and that the place is not the eldorado created in their imaginations by those who lured them. Faith, for instance in *Merchants...*, airs the disappointment she feels about the all-fantastic, illusionary stories of Europe in contrast to what she actually sees. She voices:

We arrived Milan's central Station in the afternoon. I was disappointed at the buildings I saw. They looked so old. I even saw white people who were beggars and homeless.... And I wondered, poor people, here? White people, beggars? Homeless? Just like back home? And Lizzy had spoken about minimum wage and no lack here. I was shocked. (229)

This shock is what most migrants get to face upon arriving their target countries in Europe or America. Onyerionwu considers this to be the major thematic thrust in the 'transatlantic novel.' She notes:

It is mainly the overestimation of the characters' chances of survival and the opportunities for the realization of their dream life (or life dreams), and the tragic disillusionment that comes with it, that engages the new transatlantic novel. (8)

The novelists, through an artistic delineation of characters, creative use of language and narrative style, have added an additional strand or fiber to the

campaign against neo-slavery. Urama and Nwachukwu summarize that the portrayal of human trafficking in the crude and somewhat obscene manner as “to revoke and reinvigorate its confrontation from people all over the world.” (124). Characters such as Faith, Lovett and Sisi, cutting across both texts are seen rebelling against the grave injustice done to them. Their pluckiness in defying the threats of their madams is laudable and they need the support of all those around the globe who still have a conscience. Their counterparts in reality need an intervention to rescue them from the chains binding them, from the endless debt strapping their necks. Don Lorenzo, an Italian priest in *Merchants of Flesh* poses a question that begs critical attention and evaluation from everyone in the society. He asks Faith and other girls ready to renounce the shameful job: “Do you want your daughters and your nieces to go through what you went through?” (210). This is a way of interrogating the society in general because the next victim could be anyone’s daughter, niece, friend, sister, and so on. This sort of question comes to validate the standing of Mohamadou Kane that “the author has to think of the future when he is writing.” (66) Unigwe and Chinwuba put the safety of posterity at the very core of their crafting of both novels. This is the reason why they have pointed out the dangers and odds involved in travelling abroad without a definite purpose. Therefore, those longing to find their way to any European destination (by any means possible) can begin to have a rethink, knowing that life over there is not exactly the utopic images they see behind closed eyes.

It is pertinent to note the significance of the triumph that follows the revolt orchestrated by Faith in *Merchants of Flesh*. She goes from one location to the next “preaching this gospel of freedom... this gospel of redemption, of escape, of rebellion” to all other enslaved sex workers like herself. (254) Faith can no longer stand the status quo of being the oppressed, the silenced in the midst of an array of choices life presents her with. Therefore, adopting the revolutionary dialectics of the Marxist ideology, she questions this status quo and sparks an insurrection against the bourgeoisie powers that exploit her and the other girls. Her courage in the face of danger pays off. The arrest of the madams in Italy and the lynching of one of their agents in Nigeria come to illustrate the triumph of the oppressed over the oppressor made possible by characters’ will of resistance and rebellion. Also, the desire of Chinwuba to completely extirpate the deep-rooted structures of these traffickers is manifested through this action. The revolutionary impulse, as Ayi Kwei Armah inputs, is “married to the ideal of universal justice” (497). It is this universal justice that Chinwuba seeks through the voice and actions of Faith. The victims can try to gather up whatever slivers of their lives they can

muster and carry on with new hopes, with freedom to think, decide and choose for themselves. In other words, there has been an attempt to restore the lost dignity of these trafficked persons and also to salvage future disasters of enslavement. Chinua Achebe has observed that it is the worst thing imaginable to lose one's dignity and self-respect; and it is at the same time the writer's duty to help them redeem it "by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost." (8) Chika Unigwe and Ifeoma Chinwuba have performed this duty remarkably well.

Language and Stylistic Strategies

An author's language, without doubt, conveys his message with depth and profundity and also becomes signatory of the author's image. It is by means of the instrumentality of language that the ideas, housed in the mind, are transferred to the reader in a way the writer deems most suitable. B. I. Chukwere contends that language constitutes "the gateway to success in the literary art" (26).

Chika Unigwe and Ifeoma Chinwuba configure the language in their respective texts—*On Black Sisters' Street* and *Merchants of Flesh*—to be able to intensely reflect their subject matters (of human trafficking and forced sex labour), their ideological standings on same matters; as well as to shoulder the heft of the commentary they pass on the deathtrap of trafficking. Their linguistic choices, assembled with great care and purpose, are enough to illuminate the disaster wreaked upon society by human trafficking. Pertinently also, both authors strive to make their language simple and devoid of excessive grammaticality, but at the same time being able to convey their narratives, their comments and their visionary inclinations. For instance, in describing the enslavement and debasement of the trafficked, Unigwe depends on the efficacy of linguistic choices, thus:

Madam's anger manifested itself in a laughter that was dry like a cough and a sneering, 'Ah, so you've earned enough money now to waltz into work whenever you want?' For a week she refused to let Efe use her booth. Instead, Efe had been forced to work in bars... having sex in dingy hotel rooms if she was lucky or servicing those on tight budgets in bar room toilets.... One week of working under such conditions was enough to put

anyone off getting into Madam's bad books (*On Black...* 8).

The same simplicity of diction—and at the same, depth of expression—is captured in Chinwuba's text, thus:

She needed seven more girls. Seven young girls. Between twelve and sixteen. The market now called for younger girls, virgins if available. It cost up to four million lira in Italy to deflower them.... Now people were praying for female children that would eventually go to Italy when they reached puberty. People now wished pregnant women to “born” females, baby girls that would go to Italy, twelve years later, and take over the baton from a sister or aunt or cousin before them. (*Merchants...* 70-71)

The words in the illustrations given above are simple selections which efficiently picture the atrociousness of human trafficking.

Given that the title of Chinwuba's text is *Merchants of Flesh*, which can be interpreted as “sellers of human beings”, the author garners linguistic choices (words, phrases and clauses) that are apparently suggestive of trade and the haggling of prices and amounts for the trafficked victims. Examples of these expressions include: “now the market was for twelve-year olds” (71); “...if her suppliers chose well,... she could make between fifty to sixty dollars on each girl” (72); “...was paid a one hundred thousand lira to infect Tira” (79); “There was merit in selling off [the girls] wholesale” (81); and so on. These expressions are stylistic strategies employed by the author to foreground the evils of human trafficking which reduces humans (girls in this case) to mere market commodities that are auctioned, purchased and used.

Another important stylistic strategy which both authors adopt is the fashioning of their language to align with the speech patterns and mannerisms of Nigerian people (a microcosm of continental Africa). By mobilizing elements such as code-switching and code-mixing (where indigenous expressions feature), Pidgin English and so on, a purely African flavor is given to the texts through the thoughts, speeches, beliefs and

actions of the characters. Some of these can be spotted in the following units from *On Black sisters' Streets*: “*isi akwukwo*” (19); “...drive us *fia fia fia* around Lagos” (20); “*Oloshi*” (43); “*Money wey full everywhere like san' san'...*” (49); “*Eziokwu*” (144); and numerous others. These colourful varieties also feature in *Merchants of Flesh*, in: “*Owian ohie*” (37); “So Bini men are not enough for you, eh?” (98); “Who wan do back?” (115); and so on. These indigenous expressions do not only help in detailing the African narrative, but also come to reveal that the authors give the African audience a primary position. As Allwell Obalogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu contend, these indigenous linguistic colours aid in “presenting the functionality of the [indigenous] language” to the audience (271).

In summary, the language and style of both novels highlight the novelists' condemnation of the nefarious activities of human traffickers, and also serves as a medium of canvassing for society to confront such vices.

Conclusion

Art lends a helping hand when the need arises to put right societal wrongs and inadequacies. Naguib Mahfouz considers it to be “generous and sympathetic,” further adding that writers employ it to “cleanse humanity of moral pollution.” (123-124). Chika Unigwe and Ifeoma Chinwuba have taken a sympathetic approach to the plight of the victims of human trafficking. Through the impressive manipulation of literary devices—plot, characterization, setting and language—they have emphasized the need to sanitize the moral aspect of human living. The message is clearly passed to everyone for caution. Bearing in mind the grief-stricken experiences of the protagonists of the novels and the miserable manner in which they end, one is equipped not to fall prey. Nadine Gordimer considers the imaginative capability of the writer to be galvanized “in times and places of socially seismic upheavals... and the spirit of creativity pushes towards new growth” (118). By exploring elements of history, politics, socio-economic conditions, religion and others which to the New Historicists are interwoven to make meaning in a text, Unigwe and Chinwuba vividly mirror what the society is. Both authors have joined their literary voices with others who explore a similar subject matter to give a piercing, far-reaching scream for everyone to rid the society of human trafficking. Russel West-Pavlov notes that fiction serves as a channel of “speaking the unspeakable, of representing experiences which elude representation” (111). This is what Unigwe and Chinwuba have engaged in. They have stoically confronted an issue which

has lain shrouded in obscurity for a long time; and by so doing, they have set the ground for its rectification.

Works cited

- Achebe, Chinua. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" in G. D. Killam (Ed) *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 1973. 7-13.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. "Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-à-vis African Revolutionary Theory and Praxis." In Olaniyan, Tejumola and Ato Quayson (Eds). *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Uk: Blackwell Pub., 2007. Pp. 496-503.
- Arndt, Susan. *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures..* Isabel Cole (Trans) New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002.
- Chinwuba Ifeoma. *Merchants of Flesh*. Ibadan: Kraftgriots, 2011.
- Chukwera, B. I. "The Problem of Language in African Creative Writing" in *African Literature Today*. No. 3 (Combined Volume 1-4: Reprint), 1982. 15-26.
- Gordimer, Nadine. "Three in Bed: Fiction, Morals and Politics" In *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Eds. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. United Kingdom: Blackwell Press, 2007. 115-121.
- Grillot, Suzette. "What to Read Now: Human Trafficking"
<http://worldliteraturetoday.org/july/what-to-read-now-human-trafficking>. Retrieved August 28, 2017.
- Kane, Mahamodu. "The African Writer and His Public" in *African Writers on African Writing*. Ed. G. D. Killam London: Heinemann, 1973. 53-72.
- Mahfouz, Naguib. "Nobel Lecture" In *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Eds. Olaniyan, Tejuola and Ato Quayson. United Kingdom: Blackwell Press, 2007. 122-125.
- Odokwu, Patricia. "Human Trafficking: Nature, Causes and Effects."
<http://www.google.com/patricia-odokwu-human-trafficking-nature-causes-and-effects/html>. Retrieved August 22, 2017.

Onukaogu, Alwell, Onyerionwu, ezechi. *The Aesthetics of Commitment and Narrative*. Ibadan: Kraft abooks Ltd., 2010.

Onyerionwu, Ezechi. "New Nigerian Transatlantic Novel and sex slave Narrative in Bisi Ojediran's *A Daughter for Sale*.in The Guardian Newspaper, October 2, 2016. <http://m.guardian.ng/art/new-nigerian-transatlantic-narrative-in-bisi-ojediran's-a-daughter-for-sale-part-1>. Retrieved August 19, 2017.

Opara, Chioma. *Her Mother's Daughter: The African Writer As woman*. Port Harcourt: University of Portharcourt Press Ltd., 2004.

Unigwe, Chika. *On Black sisters' Street*. London: Vintage Books, 2009.

Urama, Evelyn and Chukwuka Nwachukwu. "Human Trafficking: Commercial Sexual exploitation and Forced domestic Labour in African Literature. In *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 5 (2) , 2007. 123-137.

UNODC Report on Human Trafficking Exposes Modern Form of Slavery. www.unodc.org/unodc/en/humantrafficking/global-report-on-human-trafficking-in-persons.html. Retrieved August 23, 2017.

West-Pavlov, Russell. "Speaking the Unspeakable in Iweala and Kourouma: The Trauma of Child Soldiers, Literary stylistics and storytelling. In Makokha, J. K. S., Ogone Ohiero and Russel West-Pavlov (Eds.) *Style in African Literature: Essays on Literary Stylistics and Narrative Styles*. Amsterdam: Radopi, 2012. 111-126.