

Complicit Bodies: Self-Objectification and the Psychoanalytic Logic of Female Subjugation in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

Ebi Kuku

Department of English and Literary Studies
Niger Delta University,
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria
Kuku4ebi@gmail.com 08107856831

Tarimoweni Justline Egule

Department of English and Literary Studies
University of Africa, Toru-orua, Bayelsa State
tarimoweni.egule@uat.edu.ng 08030684147/08075043688

<https://doi.org/10.56201/ijelcs.vol.11.no7.2026.pg22.32>

Abstract

Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street narrates the recruitment of four African women into a sex trade network in Antwerp, and each woman arrives at that network through a decision she makes rather than a force applied against her. This paper reads Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi through a psychoanalytic feminist lens that draws on Jessica Benjamin's account of submission as identification, Nancy Chodorow's theory of gendered psychic reproduction and Tanjare' McKay's model of self-objectification, arguing that the novel stages a double objectification in which patriarchal valuation of the female body is first imposed by others and then internalised as a means of survival. Close attention to the four-character studies in the text shows that complicity does not cancel coercion; it reveals the psyche as the site where structural subjugation is converted into personal motive. The paper closes by asking what a self-objectification model built from Western consumer contexts misses when applied to a migration narrative shaped by poverty, war and religious abuse, and argues that Unigwe's novel demands a revision of the concept rather than a straightforward application of it.

Keywords: *psychoanalytic feminism; self-objectification; double objectification; Chika Unigwe; patriarchy.*

Introduction

Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* opens with an image that unsettles the standard narrative of trafficking: four women who know, in varying degrees of detail, what awaits them in Antwerp, and who board the plane regardless. Efe accepts Oga Dele's offer with a working understanding of the trade she is entering; Ama treats the same offer as an escape route she has prayed for since childhood; Sisi weighs it against a university degree that has produced no job; only Alek arrives without a clear picture of the arrangement, and even she comes to accept its terms once she is inside it. Reading these decisions as instances of naivety or moral failure would flatten what the novel is doing with the psychology of its characters. This paper argues instead that Unigwe stages a process of self-objectification in which each woman, prior to her contact

with Oga Dele, has already absorbed a valuation of her own body as an object with a market price, and that her later cooperation with the men who exploit her is the visible surface of psychic conditioning rather than a departure from victimhood.

The premise that patriarchal subjugation operates on the psyche as much as on the body has a long history in feminist thought. Joseph Pleck traces several competing theories of patriarchal masculinity, from mother identification to an unconscious fear of castration, each locating male dominance in psychic structure rather than in deliberate policy (57-68). Berna Arslan and her co-authors locate the oppression of women in what they describe as women's "biological, physiological and generic differences," treated as natural facts rather than as social constructions (25), a framing echoed in Oscar Browning's remark, preserved by Virginia Woolf, that "the best of women was intellectually the inferior of the worst man" (qtd. in Woolf 19). Karen Offen names the resulting arrangement "male pretensions to monopolise societal authority" (153), and Allan Johnson, cited by Mary Becker, identifies "superstructures that empower and encourage male-centredness" as the mechanism by which that monopoly is reproduced across every domain of social life (qtd. in Becker 24). What these accounts share is a refusal to locate patriarchy solely in individual men; patriarchal norms are treated instead as a diffuse conditioning process that both sexes inherit and, in different ways, enact. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's argument for a different kind of socialisation for boys and girls rests on the same premise, that gender identity is a product of early conditioning rather than a fixed biological fact, and that the conditioning is transferable across generations (Adichie). Judith Lorber gives this transfer its clearest formulation: "gendered norms and expectations get built into women's and men's sense of self as a certain kind of human being" (29). It is this internalisation, rather than any single act of external prohibition, that the present paper treats as the operative mechanism in Unigwe's novel. The source thesis from which this paper is drawn develops a comparable argument across three novels; the present paper narrows the field to *On Black Sisters' Street* alone, since concentrating on a single migration narrative allows the psychoanalytic model to be tested against a specific historical situation, transnational sex work organised between Lagos and Antwerp, rather than surveyed across unrelated domestic settings. The research problem this paper addresses follows directly from that gap: feminist criticism of trafficking narratives has tended to divide its attention between the economic and political forces that create trafficking routes, and the men who operate them, while treating the psychology of the trafficked woman herself as either self-evident, she is a victim, or beside the point. Unigwe's novel resists that division by giving each of its four women a distinct psychic history that precedes her contact with Oga Dele, and the aim of this paper is to trace how those four histories converge on a single outcome despite their different starting points. Establishing that convergence matters beyond this one novel, since it offers a model for reading complicity in other African migration narratives without collapsing that complicity into either full culpability or full innocence. The paper proceeds in three stages: it sets out the theoretical apparatus of submission, gendered reproduction and self-objectification; it applies that apparatus to Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi in turn; and it closes by testing the limits of the apparatus itself against the material conditions, war, poverty and religious abuse, that the psychoanalytic model risks treating as background rather than as cause. This paper's argument also needs to be placed against existing criticism of Unigwe's novel specifically, rather than only against feminist theory drawn from outside African literary studies. Amara Chukwudi-Ofoedu reads the novel through a socialist feminist lens, locating the women's objectification in social and economic conditions, failing governments and a widening rich and poor divide, that leave the female body as one of the few resources available to women in Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi's

position. Florence Orabueze reads the same novel through a legal framework, treating the trade in the four women as a contemporary form of slavery that survives because the men who profit from it, Dele chief among them, are shielded by the same law enforcement structures that ought to prosecute them. Chielozone Eze reads the novel as a document of women's subjectivity rather than a contest over gender positions, arguing that Unigwe's central interest is not to argue for or against feminism but to expose a body that has become a common commodity, and that the text stands as a signpost against the further annihilation of that body understood as a human rights violation. Each of these readings locates the cause of the women's exploitation outside the women themselves: in economic structure for Chukwudi-Ofoedu, in legal failure for Orabueze, in a culture of ownership for Eze. This paper does not dispute any of these accounts. Its claim is narrower and complementary rather than corrective: that alongside the social, legal and cultural causes these three critics identify, Unigwe's narration also gives each woman a psychic history that shapes how she receives Dele's offer once it reaches her, and that this psychic dimension has received markedly less critical attention than the structural one has.

Theoretical Framework: Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalytic feminism, as a distinct school within feminist theory, treats the unconscious rather than law or economics as the primary site where gender inequality is produced and sustained; Kristina Wolff traces the school's origin to an attempt to explain why women continued to accept subordination even after legal and economic barriers to equality had been formally lifted (Wolff). Wolff's premise creates an immediate problem for this particular novel, since two of the four women, Sisi and Alek, have suffered a very concrete failure of economic opportunity and legal protection rather than a purely psychic one; Sisi's university degree produces no job, and Alek's entire legal and material footing as a person with a household is destroyed by war before Polycarp ever appears. If psychoanalytic feminism explains only the subordination that persists after material barriers are removed, it would seem to have little purchase on Sisi and Alek specifically, and to apply more cleanly to Efe and Ama, whose material alternatives, a cleaning job, Mama Eko's buka, remain open at the moment each chooses Titus or Dele regardless. The novel's own construction resists this tidy division. Alek submits not only to material necessity but to the renaming Dele performs on her afterward, an act with no economic content whatsoever, and Sisi's insistence to Luc that she is "as complicit as Dele" (Unigwe 270) treats her own decision, not only her poverty, as the operative cause of what happened to her. Read against the novel this closely, Wolff's model needs revision rather than rejection: psychic conditioning operates for Unigwe's characters not only once material options run out but alongside them, doing work that a socialist or legal account of the same events, of the kind Chukwudi-Ofoedu and Orabueze offer, does not by itself explain. That gap between the material and the psychic is the specific puzzle Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi each pose in different registers, and it is the puzzle this paper takes as its object.

The reading offered here rests on three interlocking concepts: submission as an act of psychic identification, the intergenerational reproduction of gendered subjectivity and self-objectification as a survival strategy. Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* supplies the first of these. For Benjamin, a woman's submission to authority is not simple capitulation but an act of identification, since submitting connects a girl to the mother who submitted before her and to the norms that mother enacted, whether or not those norms serve the girl's own interests. Benjamin's account explains why several characters in Unigwe's novel accept exploitative arrangements without the coercion that trafficking narratives conventionally assume; the acceptance functions,

for them, as a route to connection rather than as a surrender. Efe's relationship with Titus supplies an early instance of this logic, examined in detail later in this paper, in which submission produces a sense of belonging that outweighs its material cost. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* extends Benjamin's premise by arguing that mothers reproduce daughters who resemble themselves psychologically, because the physiological likeness between mother and daughter deepens their identification, whereas sons individuate earlier and more completely. Chodorow's model implies that patriarchal norms survive not because fathers impose them on sons and daughters equally, but because mothers, sharing the deepest bond with their daughters, unintentionally transmit the same submissive patterning they themselves inherited. Sisi's mother appears too briefly in Unigwe's novel to test this claim in detail, but Ama's mother, beaten into silence by her husband's brutality and unable to protect her daughter from Brother Cyril's abuse, models exactly the submission Chodorow describes. Ama's own drift into commodified sex work reads as a rejection of that model that nonetheless reproduces its central premise, that a woman's body is available for use by whoever holds power over her. Tanjare' McKay's model of self-objectification names the third and most direct mechanism at work in the novel. McKay argues that objectification becomes double when a woman is first reduced to a "what" rather than a "who" by external social judgement, and then internalises that reduction so completely that she comes to treat her own body as a resource to be managed for profit (57-58). The distinction matters because it separates two forms of harm that trafficking narratives often collapse into one: the harm inflicted by traffickers and clients, and the prior harm of a culture that has already taught a woman to think of her body as exchangeable before any trafficker approaches her. Unigwe's four protagonists differ sharply in the paths that bring them to Oga Dele; poverty drives Sisi, war and displacement drive Alek, adolescent desire for luxury drives Efe, and a wish to escape religious abuse drives Ama. McKay's framework accounts for why all four nonetheless arrive at the same transaction: each has already learned, through a distinct route, to treat her body as separable from her personhood. The historical precedent for treating a woman as exchangeable property predates Unigwe's contemporary setting considerably. Women exchanged between kingdoms to secure peace, a practice Chinua Achebe records in *Things Fall Apart*, establish that the commodification of female bodies has functioned as a mechanism of social order long before the transnational sex trade gave it a modern form (Achebe). What changes in Unigwe's novel is not the fact of commodification but its direction: rather than being exchanged by others, Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi negotiate their own exchange. The analysis that follows reads this shift as the practical expression of self-objectification, not as evidence of a culpability equal to that of the men who profit from them.

Textual Analysis

i) Efe: Materialism and the Absence of a Counter-Model

What does it mean for a sixteen-year-old to treat her own body as an investment before any trafficker has approached her? Efe supplies Unigwe's clearest instance of this calculation. She begins a sexual relationship with Titus, a man decades older than her, and the narration frames the relationship in financial rather than emotional terms from the outset. She measures Titus by rumour rather than affection: he "had fortune that was rumoured to be vast. Money wey full everywhere like san' san'," and had promised her "new clothes. New shoes. Heaven. Earth" (Unigwe 49). The excess in that promise, heaven and earth offered by a man whose actual wealth Efe has not verified, signals that she is responding to a fantasy she has already constructed rather than to a fact Titus has demonstrated. When she later reasons that enduring him is a "small price

to pay" for the goods she wants (Unigwe 58), the phrase converts abuse into a transaction she has priced herself; this is precisely the self-objectifying move McKay's model predicts, in which harm is not denied but budgeted. The scene in which Titus draws currency from "a huge bundle of like notes" does more analytic work than a simple bribery moment. The narrator notes that "it was not just the money, it was the crispness of it, the smell of the Central Bank" that sways Efe (Unigwe 50), locating her desire in sensory intensity rather than in a reasoned calculation of her own interests. Chodorow's account of gendered psychic reproduction offers one explanation for why this sensory seduction succeeds so completely, though the explanation must be offered cautiously here. The chapter of the source thesis this paper draws on does not discuss Efe's mother, and no maternal figure appears anywhere in the passages analysed above to supply the counter-model Chodorow's theory would predict. What the skin lightening episode shows directly is a girl calibrating her body to male preference with no alternative on offer: Efe switches to Tura soap because "she knew men preferred light skinned girls" (Unigwe 55-56), a preference she has absorbed from no traceable source within the material this paper examines. Whether that absence reflects Efe's actual family history in the wider novel or only the scope of the chapter this analysis is confined to is a question the present paper cannot settle without the full text in hand; what can be said on the available evidence is that Titus's cash, and later Oga Dele's clientele, stand as the only authorities visible in Efe's self-understanding across these scenes. Titus abandons Efe once her pregnancy becomes public, and the social punishment that follows falls on her alone. A cab driver assumes she is unmarried and remarks that she is "about to have her bastard" in his car (Unigwe 66), while Titus's wife calls her a "shameless whore" and orders her from the house as Titus, audible in the background, continues eating his meal undisturbed (Unigwe 70-71). This asymmetry, in which the man who initiated the affair suffers no comparable judgement, confirms Adichie's claim that patriarchal socialisation assigns different consequences to the same act depending on the sex of the actor who commits it. What the novel adds to Adichie's general claim is a specific consequence for Efe's own psychology. Rather than rejecting the logic that punished her, she reproduces it in later life, becoming a "Madam" who buys girls into prostitution herself (Unigwe). Her trajectory from object to broker demonstrates that self-objectification, once internalised, does not require continued male instruction to persist; she completes Titus's and Dele's project on her own initiative, offering the clearest evidence in the novel that objectification, once doubled, can become self-sustaining. Efe's own account of her disgrace deserves closer attention than the plot summary above allows, since it shows the moral judgement of others being absorbed rather than merely endured. Before her pregnancy, she treats external judgement as interference she can disregard; afterwards, she reports that "people look at me as if I am a dirt" (Unigwe 65), a sentence that registers not only what others think of her but her acceptance of their verdict as accurate. Lorber's claim that gendered expectations become part of "women's and men's sense of self" offers the clearest gloss on this shift (29): Efe's self-perception changes to match the public judgement levelled against her, even though the man who shares equal responsibility for her pregnancy faces no equivalent scrutiny. That the novel records this change in the first person, rather than through a narrator's summary, underlines how completely the external verdict has become an internal one.

ii) **Alek: Trauma, Attachment and the Renaming Scene**

Alek's story begins not with a desire for luxury but with loss. Intertribal conflict in Sudan leaves her without her household, and Polycarp's ordinary attentions become, in that vacuum, indistinguishable from love. She wants "so very much to be touched by him" (Unigwe 197), and

Polycarp exploits this vulnerability deliberately, finding "a reason to be near her while she chopped wood" and touching her neck "so gently that she almost missed it" (Unigwe 198). Benjamin's theory of submission as identification clarifies why Alek reads Polycarp's calculated attentiveness as intimacy rather than manipulation. Having lost the family relations through which she would ordinarily secure connection, she transfers that need onto the first man who offers even a simulation of care, and the transfer is strong enough that Polycarp "sneaked into her heart and carved out a comfortable place for himself in there" without resistance (Unigwe 200). Polycarp discards Alek once his obligations to his own family require it, informing her that his parents "want me to marry an Igbo girl" and that he "can't marry a foreigner" (Unigwe 225), before arranging, in the same conversation, to send her abroad through a man he knows. The offer to fund her passage rather than fund a life for her in Nigeria is a deliberate substitution, replacing an obligation he will not meet with a transaction he can afford, and Alek accepts the substitution without demanding the alternative. The renaming scene that follows in Antwerp extends this logic to its furthest point. Oga Dele decides that "the name has to go," since Alek "sound too much like Alex," a "man's name," and instructs that she be given a "fine name for fine gal like her" instead (Unigwe 230). Alek offers no protest as her name, the most basic marker of individual identity, is reassigned by men who have never met her before that room. The narrator explains her silence in terms consistent with Benjamin's model of identification under trauma: "the soldiers that raped her that night in Daru had taken her strength, and Polycarp's betrayal had left her unwilling to seek it back," and she resolves instead never again to let her happiness depend on another person (Unigwe 231). The irony is exact. The resolution to stop depending on others is voiced in the same scene in which she submits, without resistance, to having her name taken from her by men she does not know, which suggests that her stated resolve operates at the level of conscious intention while her behaviour continues to follow the older, unconscious pattern of submission Chodorow and Benjamin both describe. The alliance between Polycarp and Oga Dele is worth pausing on, since it shows self-objectification being handed from one male authority to the next without any interruption in which Alek might reassert control. Polycarp does not simply abandon her; he actively arranges her transfer, telling her that he knows "a man who will help you" and can "get you into London. America. Anywhere you choose" (Unigwe 225), phrasing that presents the arrangement as a gift to her while in fact discharging his own remaining obligation at minimal cost to himself. Alek's failure to request the money directly, rather than accepting transport to another man's authority, confirms Benjamin's point that submission of this kind persists because it satisfies a need for connection that outright independence would not; dependence on Polycarp, however damaging, is at least familiar, whereas dependence on no one is not a position the novel allows her the psychic resources to occupy.

iii) Ama: Revolt That Still Commodifies

Ama's case complicates the pattern established by Efe and Alek, since her entry into sex work reads less as passive absorption of a market logic than as a deliberate act of revolt against a specific abuser. Raised under a stepfather, Brother Cyril, who beats her mother for imperfect laundry and sexually exploits Ama herself, she directs her early ambition entirely toward escape, praying nightly "that it bypassed her father's ears and the pastor's ears, that it pierced heaven to land gently beside God's right ear" (Unigwe 134). Her mother's condition, forced to "boil the clothes the assistant pastor... had to wear so that his purity glowed" while absorbing beatings for any failure (Unigwe 144), is the clearest textual instance of the Chodorow pattern discussed

above: a mother whose submission becomes the model her daughter must either repeat or actively refuse.

Ama chooses refusal, but the refusal takes a form that still relies on the logic it opposes. Reasoning that Brother Cyril "had taken what he wanted, no questions asked" and that strange men "taking and paying for her services" abroad would at least "earn you respect just for being there" (Unigwe 166), she treats commodified sex work as a form of leverage against a system that has already commodified her without payment. Her closing question, "So. Why not?" (Unigwe 166), reads as agency rather than resignation, yet the agency she claims operates entirely within McKay's self-objectification framework rather than outside it; Ama does not reject the premise that her body is exchangeable, she merely insists on setting her own price for the exchange. This is the sharpest instance in the novel of the double objectification McKay describes, since Ama's revolt against her stepfather's uncompensated exploitation produces, as its outcome, a compensated version of the same arrangement. Mama Eko, who runs the buka where Ama works before leaving for Antwerp, offers the one voice in the novel that challenges this reasoning directly, warning her plainly, "I don't trust that Dele. Not one little bit" (Unigwe 169). Ama rejects the warning, and her rejection is significant because Mama Eko represents exactly the kind of alternative maternal model Efe's narrative lacks; here the model exists, and is refused. Ama also agrees to be "sampled" by Dele before her departure, a detail the novel states without elaboration, allowing the transaction to speak for itself. Read against Chodorow's framework, Ama's revolt is best understood not as a rejection of her mother's submissive pattern but as an inversion of it: where her mother absorbed violence without recompense, Ama insists on being paid for hers, which changes the terms of her subjugation without changing its structure.

iv) Sisi: Sacrifice, Autonomy and Its Cost

Sisi's route to Antwerp begins with a structural failure rather than a psychological one. Her family's poverty makes her university degree the household's central hope, and her graduation produces, briefly, the belief that "everything dreamed" is now within reach, including a house large enough for "Saturday night parties" and financial support for her parents (Unigwe 18). When the degree yields no employment, Oga Dele's offer arrives as the only route left toward that promise, and Sisi accepts it with the same instrumental clarity Efe shows toward Titus, if with none of Efe's initial enthusiasm. Her willingness to work as "an average of fifteen men" a night when trade is good (Unigwe 260) is presented by the novel not as depravity but as arithmetic, a woman meeting a quota she has set for herself in service of a goal that predates her arrival in Belgium.

What distinguishes Sisi from the other three women is the moment at which she breaks from the submissive pattern rather than the pattern itself. When Luc urges her to leave the trade and report Dele to the authorities, she refuses the role of pure victim he is offering her, insisting instead that "she was as complicit as Dele... He didn't exactly tie my hands and feet and dump me on the plane... I could have chosen not [to] come" (Unigwe 270). This is the clearest act of individuation in the novel, a woman naming her own agency against a man who wants to cast her only as prey, and it corresponds closely to the individuation Chodorow associates with resisting inherited patterns of submission. The novel does not reward this individuation. Sisi is killed shortly afterwards by Segun, acting on the authority Dele and Madam still hold over her, which means that the one character who articulates her own complicity most clearly, rather than accepting either total blame or total innocence, is also the one character the novel's economy of exploitation cannot allow to survive.

v) Collective Objectification: The Window and the Street

Beyond the four individual case studies, Unigwe stages a moment of collective objectification that generalises the argument developed above across the whole community of women on the street. The men who visit Vingerlinstraat are catalogued not as individuals but as recurring types, "young men in their thirties with chins as soft as a baby's buttocks," "young boys in a frazzled eagerness to grow up," and "old men with mottled skin and flabby cheeks looking for something young" (Unigwe 178-79), a taxonomy that reduces the women behind the glass to a single undifferentiated service regardless of which client stands before them. Ama's description of herself and the others as "the viagra they need to face the world again" (Unigwe 206) shows a woman adopting the client's own instrumental vocabulary to describe herself, which is self-objectification stated in its most explicit form rather than inferred from behaviour. Sisi's training for the window, in which she "learned to stand," "learned to smile, to pout," and "learned to rap at the window" to attract passers-by (Unigwe 237), presents commodification as a set of acquired skills, further evidence that self-objectification functions in the novel as a competence developed over time rather than an inborn trait or a single catastrophic decision.

Conclusion

Reading Efe, Alek, Ama and Sisi through Benjamin, Chodorow and McKay clarifies how patriarchal valuation of the female body migrates from social judgement into personal motive, but the migration this paper has traced raises a further problem that the psychoanalytic model, taken alone, cannot resolve. McKay's concept of self-objectification developed from research on Western media and consumer culture, where pressure to commodify the body operates largely through image and advertising rather than through war, unemployment and absolute poverty. Sisi's decision follows the collapse of a specific material promise, a university degree her family believed would lift them out of poverty and that instead produced nothing (Unigwe 18); Alek's decision follows the destruction of her entire household in a conflict she had no part in starting. Applying a framework built for advertising-saturated societies to these two cases risks understating how thoroughly structural deprivation, rather than psychic conditioning alone, narrows the range of options each woman can imagine for herself. Sisi's death complicates the picture further. She is the character who comes closest to individuating from the submissive pattern Chodorow describes, and it is this same act of self-assertion, naming her own complicity to Luc rather than accepting the role of pure victim, that precipitates her murder. If psychic resistance to self-objectification is punished within the novel's world as severely as compliance with it is rewarded, then the emphasis some feminist criticism places on individual women recognising and resisting their own objectification carries a risk the novel makes explicit: recognition without a change in material circumstance does not guarantee safety, and may instead provoke retaliation from those whose profit depends on continued compliance. The four-character studies developed here therefore support a claim broader than the one this paper opened with. Self-objectification, in Unigwe's novel, is neither a symptom to be corrected through consciousness raising nor an alibi that excuses the traffickers who profit from it; it is a psychic adaptation to conditions, war, poverty, religious abuse and consumer aspiration, that precede any individual woman's contact with the men who exploit her. Scholarship that treats patriarchy as a purely material system risks missing why a woman like Efe returns, years later, to the trade that damaged her, becoming a Madam in her turn; scholarship that treats patriarchy as a purely psychic system risks missing why Sisi's attempt to break the pattern ends in her death rather than her freedom. Read through Benjamin, Chodorow and McKay together, *On Black*

Sisters' Street suggests that the psychoanalytic and the material are not competing explanations of female subjugation but a single mechanism observed from different distances, and a fuller account of self-objectification in African migration narratives will need to hold both distances in view at once. This paper's scope, one novel read through one theoretical cluster, was set out as a deliberate narrowing in the introduction, and the narrowing carries a cost worth naming plainly rather than hedging. Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*, the two other texts from which this analysis was drawn, stage female complicity within domestic polygamous households in Nigeria rather than within transnational trafficking, and a comparative reading across all three would test whether the double objectification traced here in Antwerp holds its shape when the market for a woman's body is her own husband's compound rather than a foreign street. Iya Tope's exchange for a failed cassava harvest in the Baba Segi household, mentioned above only as a historical parallel to Achebe, would in such a comparison become a primary text in its own right, offering a domestic counterpart to Efe's and Ama's calculated transactions that this paper has had to set aside. The claim being advanced here, that self-objectification functions as a psychic adaptation to material deprivation rather than a moral failing distinct from it, would gain considerably in force if the same pattern could be shown operating inside a household as clearly as it operates across a continent.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 2008.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Fourth Estate, 2014.
- Arslan, Berna, et al. "The Visibility of Masculine and Feminine Language in Columns." *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, pp. 25-35.
- Becker, Mary. "Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1999, 1999, pp. 21-88.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. U of California P, 1978.
- Chukwudi-Ofoedu, E. Amara. "The Domination and Sexual Objectification of Women in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy*, vol. 3, 2017, pp. 1-9.
- Eze, Chielozona. "Feminism with a Big 'F': Ethics and the Rebirth of African Feminism in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2014, pp. 91-103.
- Lorber, Judith. *The Variety of Feminisms and Their Contributions to Gender Equality*. Bibliotheks, 1997.
- McKay, Tanjare'. "Female Self-Objectification: Causes, Consequences, and Prevention." *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, vol. 6, 2013, pp. 53-70.
- Offen, Karen. "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 119-57.
- Orabueze, Florence. "The Law and Slave Trade: An Evaluation of Sex-Slavery in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*." *Nsukka Journal of Humanities*, vol. 21, 2013, pp. 47-72.
- Pleck, Joseph H. "Men's Power with Women, Other Men, and Society: A Men's Movement Analysis." *Feminism and Masculinities*, edited by Peter F. Murphy, Oxford UP, 2004, pp. 57-68.
- Unigwe, Chika. *On Black Sisters' Street*. Vintage Books, 2010.
- Wolff, Kristina. "Psychoanalytic Feminism." *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Harcourt, Brace, 1929.