

**SEXUALITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN CHIKA
UNIGWE'S
ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET**

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Abstract

The prevalence of the female voice in this age of globalisation signifies a new direction in African literature. Doubtless this scenario has enabled a good number of female writers to critique socio-cultural practices such as sexual objectification and prostitution that inhibit female subjectivity. Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street aptly illustrates the typical African woman's experience mediated by such (global) patriarchal practices. This paper seeks to examine the theme of sexuality and, in so doing, attempts to look at the extent to which ideology constitutes the female characters as subjects, thereby ensuring their participation in the reproduction of the practice of prostitution. By using Althusser's theory of interpellation, the paper hopes to argue that Unigwe's text is replete with female subjects whose agency is being impinged on, and even destabilised, by their participation in the ideological practice of sex slavery.

Key words: *sexuality, objectification, prostitution, ideology, interpellation*

Introduction

African literary landscape has been defined by the male voice for decades. However, a good number of vibrant female writers have begun to position themselves at the centre of African literary landscape in the twenty-first century. Indeed, what we have come to regard as

African literature owes its growth in principal to male literary creativity and practice. Time was when male authors dominated the literary space, but of late this seems to be no longer the case. In fact, eleven years ago, in 2004, Ernest Emenyonu, one of Africa's eminent literary scholars, noted in his editorial of *ALT 24* the upsurge in writing by African women – a development both welcome and timely, no less (xii). Doubtless the prevalence of the female voice in this age of globalisation has enabled a good number of female writers to critique socio-cultural practices such as sexual objectification and prostitution that inhibit female subjectivity. Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* aptly illustrates the typical African woman's experience mediated by such (global) patriarchal practices. One such practice is prostitution; a practice so ancient yet essentially fuelled and driven by male desire.

Textual Analysis

On Black Sisters' Street charts the lives of four girls who, hoping to escape the heartbreak, abuse and poverty in Nigeria, end up as prostitutes in Antwerp, Belgium. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, the action is presented to us through the figural narrative structure and is organised into twenty-seven sections. Although the sections reflect the perspective of each of the four protagonists namely: Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce, it is remarkable to note that all the perspectives are interwoven into the entire action. The significance of this

narrative structure is that it sheds light on the ideological relationships between and among the various subjects in the text. In the section “Zwartzusterstraat” (5-15), for instance, we see a representation of the other three characters through the eyes of Joyce/Alek:

[Sisi] also seemed genuinely nice. Ama was a basket case and, given to bellicosity, everything set her off. Efe, she was not sure about. Perhaps, given time, she would like her. She was definitely more likable than Ama, although she had her own issues. (13)

In Louis Althusser’s views, ideology is to be understood in the way society creates identities and roles for people to participate *willingly* in conditions that perpetuate the continuous maintenance of ideology. Althusser refers to this process as “Interpellation”. By interpellation, he meant the way ideology constitutes individuals as “subjects” through the mechanism of social practices and rituals. Thus, in Althusserian thinking, ideology functions to transform the individual into subject i.e. the image of the society, so that he recognises himself as a (free) subject believing in the “ideas” that his “consciousness” inspires in him and so “act(ing) according to his ideas” (168). This act of perceiving himself as a free agent encourages him to participate *freely* in the social practices of the society.

According to Althusser, the process of interpellation begins with “hailing”, which is a call to participate in a form of ideological practice; which enables ideology to function “in such a way that it recruits subjects among individuals” (178).

Ideology is, therefore, not innate in any individual. Althusser illustrates this statement with an analogy of an unborn child and how, before its birth, the child is “always-already a subject...in the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is expected once it has been conceived” (177). In this way, the child (an individual) is already interpellated as a subject of whatever particular dominant ideologies to which its parents are subjected.

Understanding Sisi: Subjection through Dreams and Prophecy

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Unigwe constructs Sisi as an alter-ego of Chisom, which is actually her real name. So both characters are one and the same. But for the purpose of clarity of presentation, we will use the moniker “Sisi” for our analysis. At the opening of the novel the narrator portrays Sisi as “relishing the thoughts of new beginnings” in her life, since she seems to have just acquired “her brand-new wealth” (1). Her delight is understandable, for her life has been one fraught with hardship and despair, though she has been “looking forward to the realisation of everything dreamed” (18). In this joyful mood, Sisi remembers the

Prophecy given to her parents by their gap-toothed soothsayer-neighbour seven days after she was born (245). Althusser has spoken about ideology always-already interpellating individuals as subjects, that is, "individuals are always-already subjects" (175). Drawing from Freud, he gives an example of a child who, even before it is born, has already been hailed as a subject in and by the ideological practices of its parents. This mirrors Sisi's experience.

Her recruitment into ideology begins at birth: Sisi's parents make her believe there is a Prophecy (245) that has configured her life/fortune. This Prophecy operates ideologically, subjecting her parents so completely that Sisi could perceive its presence in their posture, even in the photograph taken on her matriculation day (18). Her parents, as it were, respond as subjects and they keep reminding her of the Prophecy all through her adolescence. In so doing, they insert Sisi into the "silent" practices of ideology. On a denotative level, the Prophecy represents a mere prediction. But on a connotative level, we come to recognise it as an instrument of ideology. Therefore, the act of telling and reminding Sisi of the Prophecy is a hailing in itself.

Another instance of hailing is when her father reminds her to take her studies seriously, because "the only way to a better life is education" (18). Sisi recognises herself as the one who is hailed, more so because she is aware that her father often blames his stagnant career as an Admin Clerk on his inability to

complete his tertiary education. Her father was forced to quit schooling for a measly job, in order to help cater for his siblings. It comes as no surprise that Sisi spends much of her teenage-years living within an educational ideological apparatus by studying hard and at the same time thinking that once she is able to acquire a degree from a good university she will *naturally* land a well-paying job befitting her qualification. It should be pointed out that Sisi has never been short of dreams, as textual evidence shows. The “grandiosity of her dreams” may be a consequence of the poverty-stricken conditions in which she has to grow up; this might explain why Unigwe portrays her as always dreaming: of leaving Lagos, owning a house, a car, and renting a big flat for her impecunious parents (18-23). On the other hand, her dreams may be linked to the “distorted consciousness” that ideology is capable of bringing into play (Shelby 163). Though her parents offer her a falsified representation of the world which they have imagined, Sisi only recognises her own (imaginary) relationship to this world. Yet every one of them is subject to the dominant subject in the form of educational ISA.

Sisi begins to notice that her dreams are becoming “mildewed” and she has to escape “the cramped two-room flat” she shares with her parents in Ogba. She stops applying for job at this point, having realised that a degree, even from the renowned University of Lagos, could not get her any “dream” job. Her boyfriend,

meanwhile, lacks the “passion to dream” and his penurious state can barely salvage her from desperation. Sisi dismisses his life as a cul-de-sac (27). From the above we see that hailing is primarily actualised in Sisi’s relationship with her parents. The operation of ideology on a young person within the household or domestic milieu is remarkably influential.

In “Ideology and the De/Naturalisation of Meaning in the Cameroonian Novel”, Emmanuel Yewah points out that the process of ideology starts with children in any society, mainly because they have yet to internalise the ruling ideas of their society. He notes that

children play an important role as subjects in the process of naturalisation of ideology. They are formed as social subjects in their relationships, first in the context of what Louis Althusser calls *the specific familial ideological configuration...*and then in schools [educational ideological state apparatus].... (184)

Yewah’s comment above expresses exactly the processes through which Sisi is constituted as a subject in her parents’ ideological practices.

The concept of subject, according to Abrams and Harpham, is “a person with certain views and values, which, however, in every instance serve the ultimate interests of the ruling class” (184). This perspective evidences the poststructuralist thinking, which suggests

that an individual is “subjected to” the play of external forces (281). Along this line, an individual can only exist in and through the subject category, since he or she cannot be an agent of a social practice unless such a person assumes the form of a subject. Thus, interpellation has the function of constituting the individual as subject so that he or she can assume a particular position that is in conformity to the practices of ideology.

In light of this, Sisi takes on the particular subjectivity that prefigures her to act in accordance with the conditions of existence necessary for the reproduction of ideological ritual practice. Hence, she is subjected to the “material practices governed by the material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive [her] ideas” (Althusser 169). Sisi’s subjection to ideology is incarnated in other series of hailings she comes across in the course of her short-lived life as a sex worker in Antwerp’s red light district. Before she is *willingly* trafficked to Europe, she vows to herself that she must escape (30). Her vow finds expression at a hairdressing salon where she meets a loud pimp and his girl while getting her perm retouched. Implicit in this chance meeting is the hailing that takes place inside the salon when the pimp announces that the girl is going abroad: ‘Oya! Make am beautiful. She dey go abroad. Today! Beautify am!’ (31) There are other girls being tended to in the salon but they do not respond apparently. It is Sisi

who recognises this hail, believing it was she who is really being addressed, and so she responds by asking the girl (note that they are both strangers): 'Wetin you dey go abroad go do?' (32) By merely talking to the girl, she affirms her subject position as having been already interpellated in the ideology that is enacted by the pimp. This chance meeting with him will provide Sisi with her desired "escape" – to Europe, where she believes it is "to her Prophecy that she was headed" (89). It is instructive to mention that this chance meeting ultimately interpellates her into the ideological practice of sexual objectification.

In preparation of her new life, Sisi, actually known as Chisom, renames herself in Shona (44). She assumes the identity of a foreigner, not a Nigerian, but a Zimbabwean. Her desperation for this new life compels her to rename herself again and also fake a new identity as Mary Featherwill, a Mandingo, a Liberian (176). By erasing her identity she accepts the category of the subject, central to ideology. Once Sisi lands in Antwerp, she is "eager to begin" (105) – her "role" in ideology; materially, as a sex worker. All this represents her as compliant with her subject-form since "all ideology and ideological discourse are therefore based on the subject-form, the category of the subject..." (Resch 210). These acts of impersonation, one way or another, connote a ritual practice – which is crucial for the reproduction of the existing relations of production. In fact, Sisi's interpellation in this impersonation practice is animated

by her resolve to “shed her skin like a snake”, “emerge completely new” (98). Recall in the beginning chapter where she imagines herself “metamorphosing”, “becoming someone else”, and “sloughing off a life that no longer suited her” (1). Robert Paul Resch quoting Althusser explains that: “Every human, that is to say, social individual, cannot be the agent of a practice unless [s]he takes the form of a subject” (209). Her interpellation as a subject is brought to a logical conclusion, since she now accepts her subjection as natural and organises herself into the position offered by the sexual objectification ideology in the (re)presentation of a “new life” – in this case, fortunes from prostitution.

On her first outing as a sex worker, Sisi justifies her participation in ideology, that “she was not a robber, not a cheat, not a 419ner”, thus “she would make her money honestly” (210-11) – acting in accordance with her ideas, a “false consciousness”. The other instance of false consciousness is actualised in the sex scene with a Belgian client where she tries to resist her ideological positioning (212). Here is an excerpt to better emphasise this analogy:

This is not me. This is not me. This is a dream. She tottered behind him, averting her eyes from his buttocks. This is not me. I am not here. I am at home, sleeping in my bed. A Lexus sparkled in her head. Think of the money! (212)

This part is significant and evocative of what John Fiske meant by “ideology as struggle”. Analysing the Gramscian hegemonic concept, Fiske states that contradictions are inherent in material social conditions and these contradictions produce resistances to the domination of ideology (8-9). This explanation corresponds to the “struggle” between Sisi and ideology as dramatised in the scene above, with each trying to resist the other. From the scene, Sisi’s tottering signifies her reluctance to submit to ideological practice, yet her eyes are riveted to her client’s buttocks, which reinforces her subject-form, for why would she stare at his buttocks if she has not been interpellated into sexual objectification? The image of the “Lexus” is ideology’s way of subjecting her. Subjected, Sisi begins to interpellate other individuals, thereby furthering the material reproduction of ideology. Her twirling and posing in the display window case in front of passersby (237) are forms of hailing aimed at “recruiting” potential subjects. Her perfection in this act is evidenced by how quickly she masters the art of luring prospects (237). Furthermore, the scene in which she is excited to hear that Madam has “found her a display window in the Schipperskwarter” (236) legitimises her role in the system of social relations.

By the way, it is appropriate to mention that when Sisi is given a room on the Zwartezusterstraat she notices two compelling pictures on the wall depicting nudity (99). The presence of the pictures is not

accidental but underscores some premeditated design that is meant to interpellate viewers. Burgin has been quoted as saying that photography is an instrument of ideology and its essence is manipulation (Pajnik and Lesjak-Tušek 285). Reading the pictures through this statement one would not be wrong to assert that the pictures are encoded with the ideology of sexual objectification. In this instance we see how the pictures hail Sisi, by representing “reality” in her mind so that she becomes conscious of her body and buttocks (100).

Sisi’s assertion that, “I’ll make it. Even if it kills me” (118) yet corroborates her subjection in ideology and, quite ironically, actuates her death when she attempts to break with ideology. Expounding on Althusser’s theory, John Fiske says:

there is no way of escaping ideology, for although our material social experience may contradict it, the only means we have of making sense of that experience are always ideologically loaded; so the only sense we can make of ourselves, our social relations, and our social experience is one that is a practice of the dominant ideology. (8)

Sisi’s death absolutely confirms the extreme force ideology (through the RSA) is able to invoke when a subject attempts to subvert her subjection.

Understanding Efe: Subjection through Fancies and Desires

Althusser has postulated that “in order to exist, every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce” (128). We appropriate this statement, to enable us better understand Efe’s interpellation into the ideological practices of sexual objectification, especially since she emerges as the character that is most willing to subject to ideology.

In *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Efe is the first among her flat mates to arrive in Europe and live at Zwartezusterstraat. She is known for her passion for high-heeled shoes and wigs. According to Ama, she is the “Imelda Marcos of wigs” (11). Of all the four women, Efe is the shortest and the heaviest. Unlike the other girls, she never drinks and she is often teased about her juvenile buds by the others (37). Efe is what Stanzel calls a “reflector character”. She is not a mediating voice in the novel, but she is a “narrator” as well as a character within the fictional realm of the story. As a reflector character she “thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader. The reader looks at the other characters of the narrative through [her] eyes” (5). Because Efe’s perspective orients the *diegesis* of the narrative text, we can only perceive the unfolding events through her eyes. A reflector character functions in a figural narrative situation, wherein the narrative voice is occluded in the background.

Efe's story begins with her discovery of sex at the age of sixteen (49) with a man nearly thrice her age: this informs us that she has already been hailed into the practice. Unigwe portrays her as a character that is smitten by materialistic urges and longings; a girl who would never mind the intensity of "the pain between her legs" so long as she is compensated with crisp banknotes that are "enough to make [her] giddy" (50). She is obsessed with new clothes, new shoes, trendy handbags, and a car "with a little teddy bear hanging behind the windscreen" (51). All this evidences her interpellation into the ritual practice of ideology. Because ideology has to maintain its reproduction of labour power, Efe is rewarded as a matter of routine with "the money she needed for her trousers" (55) and for a shopping spree. Thus, she is paid "wages", in order to advance the material reproduction of ideological practice (130-31).

When her lover speaks about light-skinned girls, Efe recognises this hail and positions herself accordingly as a subject in the practice of sexual objectification. She starts to bleach her skin likewise because she is aware that men often prefer light-skinned girls (55-56). This reflects her being hailed into living out a false consciousness – a consciousness bound up with and bolstered by patriarchal desire. Her false consciousness could rightly be attributed to Efe's penchant for "false things" such as new clothes, new shoes, and handbags. Tommie Shelby quoting Pines explains that "ideology is

a social consciousness which takes certain false things to be true about matters having significance to the outcome of class-divided societies" (162). This aptly represents Efe's experience. Already subjected ideologically, she is delighted to hear from her lover that she is adept at satisfying a man as big, physically and figuratively, as him (54). This compliment, which we can regard as hailing, animates Efe's desire towards carrying on the trysts with her lover (57). It is worth mentioning that she dramatises her subjection in the scene where she enthuses in the presence of her sister that she is going to buy a "Mercedes Benz" (84), despite the reality of becoming a sex worker in a distant land. Indeed, she is hopeful that she will own a car by the time she has spent a year working in Europe; this conversation with her sister arises after she has been "recruited" by her boss into the practice of prostitution.

Efe's disclosure of her pregnancy to her lover, after an all-day tryst at a hotel on the outskirts of town (60), agrees with her portrayal in the text that she is nothing more than a sex object, good enough only for the titillation and satisfaction of male pleasure; nothing more, nothing less. In Efe, we see ideology's decisive hold on her, especially in the scene where her boss asks her if she would like to go abroad, and she promptly recognises this hailing and poses a rhetorical question: 'If I wan' go abroad?' (81) Her answer is a function of her being "always-already" a subject of ideology: formed, transformed, and equipped to respond to her

conditions of existence (Resch 206). Her boss then appraises her with his gaze: “his eyes going from her face to her breasts to her calves under her knee-length skirt...” (82), reducing her to the level of an object, or commodity, as well as enacting the archetypal “male gaze”, or what Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts describe as the “objectifying gaze” (175), which culminates more often than not in sexual objectification.

To foreground this observation, the scene where her boss tells Efe that she is expected to go abroad and do “sales” is in line with her subject-form of being not only sexually objectified but also commodified for commerce. The “sales” subject position is duly recognised by Efe, because she can tell “what sort of sales she was going to be involved in” (82). This position is further supported by Efe’s knowledge that “she would sell men her body” (87). Despite all this, she still accepts being objectified by justifying her participation in the practice, as it would afford her little child “a better life...good schools, become a big shot...” so he could “look after her when she was old and tired” (82) and also, at the same time, afford her siblings a better life on the whole (84).

Resch has argued that “to reproduce the existing relations of production, there must be individuals equipped to respond to the needs of society” (209). To achieve this, ideology utilises the instrument of interpellation to construct individuals as subjects. Efe’s desire to become a madam herself, to start acquiring

“girls from Brussels” (278) conforms to Resch’s observation and corresponds to the way in which labour power reproduces itself (Althusser 131-2). Efe is really determined to reproduce “herself”, as it were, for the sake of ideology. This goes to show that her “know-how” to act in accordance with the conditions for keeping the circuit [in the form of ideological reproduction] moving is consistent with ideology’s function (Hall 35). By perpetuating the material reproduction of sexual objectification, Efe ultimately establishes herself as “a free subjectivity, a centre of initiative and power, and [as]... a subjected being that submits to a higher authority and is, therefore, stripped of all freedom” (Udumukwu 249).

From the foregoing, we have attempted to analyse how Efe found her place as a subject within the material existence of an ideological apparatus (Althusser 169). In summary, Efe is constituted as a *perfect* subject that contributes to the reproduction of ideology’s dominant order i.e. patriarchal capitalism.

Understanding Alek: Subjection through Familial Norms

Unigwe portrays Alek as the only female character with a free will, who is coerced into the prostitution ritual, unlike the others who decided of their own volition to venture into the system of sex trafficking. Alek’s subjectivity, however, is formed primarily within the ideological practices of “domestic ideology”

(Udumukwu 160), or the family ideological state apparatus as Althusser would say. Her ideological positioning thus occurs in her relationship with her mother, mostly within the household, where the presence of ideology is largely concentrated, and subsequently with her soldier-boyfriend – that is, before she is inserted into the sexual objectification practice.

Although Alek's transformation as a subject occurs mostly in the family ideological apparatus, it should be noted that all ideological state apparatuses, regardless of whatever ideological apparatus is operational in a system contribute, individually and collectively, towards the same goal, which is the reproduction of the relations between the exploiters and exploited and vice-versa (Althusser 156). This ideological familial ritual is manifest in the relationship between mother and daughter, for instance, when Alek is advised, or more precisely, hailed by her mother at the age of twelve to always be "a good girl" so she would be able to save herself "for the man who will marry [her]" (186). In the familial space, maternal influence is very determining on the daughter and, as a matter of patriarchal tradition, mothers have the innate competence to naturalise social norms into the consciousness of their children. In other words, mothers do shape the subjectivities of daughters within the dominant ideological practice of their society. The interpellation of Alek is further reinforced by her mother's advice that she should remember that, for a girl, what matters most is "Marriage first" (186).

It is against this background that Alek's subject is established, so that when she sees a Nigerian soldier, at the refugee camp, she immediately organises herself into position represented by the familial ideology of marriage. In her subjection, she longs to have him play with her much the same way as he would with the refugee children (197). This longing so animates her consciousness that she begins dreaming of "the children she would have for him" (198), and of "being a mother and a wife" (199). In this instance, we see Alek representing her *lived* relationship to her real relations of production (Althusser 165). This representation is vividly captured in the scene in which she sets about "owning" the house, as befits a would-be wife:

Polycarp asked for a table that could sit three, for when they had the occasional visitor, he said. Alek smiled shyly and said she would prefer a table that could seat six. She was thinking ahead. To when they would have their own children...She would make sure they [Polycarp's family] felt at home. She would make it clear to them that they could look upon her as a sister. Or a daughter. (218)

This scene is telling, for not only has Alek imagined herself as a family-member already but she has positioned herself "successfully" as a real one. Here, we see the definiteness in the way Alek attempts to place

her imaginary relationship (i.e. a wife) against her real conditions of existence – as a live-in-lover, in passing. This representation of hers, of course, does not in any way correspond to reality, for textual evidence shows that her boyfriend’s own imaginary relationship is at variance with what she has come to recognise as “reality”. This in fact reaffirms what Althusser meant by

it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that ‘men’ ‘represent to themselves’ in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. (164)

We can relate the above excerpt to Alek’s representation of marriage. In the text, what Alek represents to herself in terms of marriage does not approximate the real *thing*, that is, the true representation of what marriage conditions entail, but what her own *lived* representation of what marriage constitutes. But this illusory belief is shattered when her boyfriend (subjected to the pressures from the cultural ideological apparatus personified by his parents) tells her he could never marry a foreigner unless she is from his own ethnic group (225). Although our focus is on Alek, one cannot help but notice her boyfriend as subjected to the familial ideological apparatus as well. It is important to note that Alek is so subjected in this

ideology that she still could not help thinking “of the woman who might take her place [in her boyfriend’s life] and have the babies that had been promised her [certainly not by her boyfriend who, all through her relationship with her, never mentions having babies with her, but by the ideas she has formed in ideology]” (232). It should be reiterated that at no time in the text does her boyfriend promise her babies, but because Alek has already been so interpellated and, as a result, has formed these “false” ideas that having submitted to him, it is, therefore, only natural that she should become the mother of his children. This shows the extent to which a person can be shaped and subjected to and by ideology.

Another instance of Alek’s subjection to ideology is evident in her meeting with the pimp where, unlike Sisi who renames herself willingly, a “sexualised” name is foisted on her to reflect her new subjectivity. According to the pimp, Alek sounds rather too much like a man’s name, while Joyce evokes jollity (230). This renaming is a conscious (patriarchal) attempt at interpellating (and/or erasing her femininity) Alek into the reproduction of the prevailing ideological practices. It could also pose as a deliberate attempt to objectify Alek as an appendage of male whim and desire. The pimp, in this case, doubles as the dominant subject (to which Alek is subjected) and also as an ideological state apparatus. Although the renaming of Alek does not only erases her identity but also prefigures her into the established social relations of sexual objectification.

Incidentally, Alek (now Joyce) is subjected to another renaming drama. Here, she is marked out and nicknamed 'Etienne's Nubian Princess' by one of her regular clients (234). In postcolonialist thinking, this action may be rightly interpreted as a power discourse between the marginalised "Other" and the dominant "centre"; an asymmetrical relationship between the powerful Western exploiter and the vulnerable exploited African. But then this is not our concern here.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ideological practices are so pervasive and commonplace in society that nothing *really* seems to take place outside ideology (Easthope and McGowan 56), as we have noted in the case of Alek, where her subjectivity is formed, transformed and regulated by the family and cultural ideological apparatuses present within the prevailing (capitalist) social formation. As a matter of fact, ideology orientates us into believing that we have some degree of choice. It predetermines us to act in certain ways, recognising and accepting roles that conform to ideology; thus, ideology structures our lives by predetermining the way we think. Moreover, ideology transforms us into subjects of the "system of illusory beliefs – false ideas" (Fiske 2), implicit in the dominant ideological practice of our particular society. This foregrounds our analysis above where we have attempted to connect the female characters' role(s) in the sexual objectification ideological practices. We have seen

the girls in *On Black Sisters' Street* believe that they all have a choice in their venture into prostitution, not realising that ideology has preset the stage for their constitution as subjects in advance. Whether it is the desire to escape poverty, home and rape, a broken relationship, the dream for a better existence and conditions, ideology being a multifaceted "material force" (Stuart 27) orchestrated these manifestations through its various state apparatuses, which all work for the same goal, that is, shape the social consciousness of individuals, so that they can live out their (imaginary) ideas/world according to the established dominant order.

In addition, we examined how ideology constituted the female characters in *On Black Sisters' Street* as subjects of the ritual practices of sexual objectification based on the fact that they recognised their roles, identified with and responded accordingly within these practices. We observed that although these girls are inserted into the ideological practices they were more or less victims of the dominant ideology of their world. In participating as subjects they were sexually objectified by men, and so became the means by which this ideology maintained and reproduced itself.

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