



## Unveiling Human-Flesh Dealing: Prostitution and Sexual Depravation in Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter*

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**Abstract** - While sharing the view that prostitution is one of the oldest professions, this essay examines this phenomenon as a social fact in post-colonial African society, tying it to the city and illuminating the various ramifications of the portraiture of the prostitute in Ekwensi's fiction. Adopting feminist theory as the implied theoretical framework which needs no further reexamination here, the essay scrutinises attitudes to prostitutes and prostitution in ancient times and in contemporary African society, before pinning down the novelist's diagnosis of the causes of this social plague.

### INTRODUCTION

The foremost African novelist who has addressed prostitutes and city life in Africa remains the late Cyprian Ekwensi whose eponymous novel, *Jagua Nana* (1961), paints the matriarch and archetypal prostitute of African literature: Jagua Nana. Projecting the city and prostitution as both sides of the same coin, Ekwensi intrinsically ties city life to promiscuity, making the former riddled with many vices, including prostitution. Since the city appears to be endowed with a capacity to alter its residents' patterns of behaviour, and because this author seems to suggest that sexual depravity is a regular feature of city life, this essay explores how the city has turned its female residents into prostitutes in his fictional world. In all likelihood, this novelist conveys through the experiences of Jagua (and subsidiary through Auntie Kate in *Jagua Nana's Daughter*) that the city bewitches its dwellers, wrecking them completely. Clearly, these women are unable, as seen in Ekwensi's classic novel, to extricate themselves from its clutches so much so that they prefer the lowest and most degrading living standard in the city to a countryside dignified life.

Prostitution has always played a crucial symbolic role in the definition of moral and sexual standards and, as such, the figure of the prostitute has been paradigmatic in the history of the sex and the city. The advent of urban facilities – like stores, night-clubs and educational institutions – gave women the chance to shift from a private to a public sphere, allowing them to directly draw a realistic picture that they viewed formerly through men's lenses (Hacini, 2019: 37). This drastic change equally allowed women to leave the countryside with its extended family model and settle in towns, thereby empowering them to



take advantage of several opportunities. Among the modern amenities brought by urbanisation, night-clubs represent a place of moral degradation, a venue where prostitution reigns supreme, the main topic of this essay.

Modern urbanisation in post-colonial Africa drives the youth to social evils, including prostitution. Most of them are attracted by night-clubs, parties and sexually degrading activities in urban settings. Oladele Taiwo (1967: 155) states the following in this connection: "In the city, the night-clubs and hotels provide evening entertainment, to which people go to dance and drink. Bachelors go in search of girls, girls in search of men, whilst married people occasionally go out to enjoy themselves."

Defined as the belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes, feminism seeks to challenge the systemic inequalities women endure on a daily basis (hooks, 1981; Gates, 1990; DeLamotte, et al. 1997). As a continuum, the field of gender in relation to cities in Global South started in the 1960s, with studies of rural women's migration to urban centres as well as the place of their work in the informal sector in urban settings (Peake, 2009: 320). Furthermore, a staggering number of studies have illuminated the representations of women in urban spaces, especially in relation to their most significant factor: their sexuality (Walkowitz, 1992; Sheldon, 1996; McDowell, 1997; Bell et al., 2001).

Structured around two main points and essentially focused on women's engagement in prostitution, this essay deploys feminist geographic studies as a theoretical tool to probe prostitution as a city phenomenon in *Jagua Nana and Jagua Nana's Daughter*. While its first point explores the concept under scrutiny, its second section investigates the city as a breeding ground for prostitution.

## 1. Prostitution

Acknowledged to be one of the oldest professions humanity has known so far, prostitution has served various purposes through history. A morally and ideologically contested terrain rife with incomprehension, prostitution remains a complex phenomenon linked to gender, culture, law, education, social control, and economic forces. In ancient times, prostitution often had religious connotations – sexual intercourse with temple maidens was an act of worship to the temple deity. In ancient Greece the *hetaerae* – professional independent courtesans who, besides developing physical beauty, usually lived fashionably alone and enjoyed an enviable position of wealth – were women of high social status. Konstantinos Kapparis' *Prostitution in the Ancient Greek World* presents prostitution as a widespread, legal, and acceptable fact of life therein. Moreover, prostitution was an unavoidable necessity in ancient Greece to the



point that the State regulated the industry and treated it as any other trade.<sup>1</sup> Prostitution, to be sure, was held at high standard there so much so that almost every prominent man has been, in one way or the other, associated with some famous prostitutes. Pushing the boundaries of female empowerment in their quest for self-promotion and notoriety, Kapparis contends, “these women, who sold their affections to the richest and most influential men of their time, have become legends in their own right.” Unlike the Greek *hetaerae* who were respected, protected and taxed by the state, the *hetaerae* in Rome were on a low social level; they were even coerced to wear wigs and special garments signifying their trade. Despite its age-old status (McGinn, 2010), Mfon U. Ekpootu (2017: 306) forthrightly points to definitional problems implicit in attempts to neatly categorise the concept, while Peter G. Forster (2000: 1-9) evokes the muddled definitional space of prostitution in western societies, further stressing its complexity when it comes to drawing up a cross-cultural perspective.

*The Canadian Encyclopedia* defines prostitution as the practice of providing sexual services for money. Because prostitution requires a buyer and a seller, it can appropriately be defined as the act of exchanging money for sexual services. Likewise, *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* conceives of it as the work of a prostitute or the practice of engaging in sex acts for money. Clearly, prostitution means having sex with people in exchange for money or other goods, according to *Britannica*:

Prostitution, the practice of engaging in relatively indiscriminate sexual activity, in general with someone who is not a spouse or a friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables. Prostitutes may be female or male or transgender, and prostitution may entail heterosexual or homosexual activity, but historically most prostitutes have been women and most clients men.<sup>2</sup>

Along the same lines of thought, Ademola K. Fayemi (2009: 3) defines prostitution as “the act of having sex for money,” while Lola Akande (2019) represents it as “the commodification of sex,” since it involves “trading or exchanging sex for money or favors.” Likewise, Chioma Nwahunanya (2011: 340) casts prostitution as “the occupational engagements of women of cheap virtue who thrive on unbridled sexual promiscuity.” Thus, a prostitute is someone, especially a woman, who earns money by selling sex. Synonyms of prostitution include, among others: sex work, vice, streetwalking, whoredom, harlotry and the oldest profession. Indeed, prostitution is the oldest profession: its practice goes back to time immemorial (Bullough, 1987; Cott, 1993; McGinn, 2010; Nwahunanya, 2011; Weitzer, 2012; Sanger, 2013).

<sup>1</sup> Konstantinos Kapparis, *Prostitution in the Ancient Greek World*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017. At <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110557954>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/prostitution>. Consulted on December 26, 2020.



If prostitution is traditionally defined as an exchange of sexual services for money or material remuneration, Marxist theoreticians view it more than that, given the notion of power over one person's body by another. Whoredom, they theorise, implies domination, for it exerts individually a right of command over another's person for a time. As Ashworth, White and Winchester (1988: 201-12) argue, control over bodies might be the main goal of all societies and is, over women bodies, fundamental. This theory, it must be stressed, is in accordance with prostitutes' own definition of the term. Indeed, prostitution, for the vast majority of the world's prostituted women, "is the experience of being hunted, dominated, harassed, assaulted, and battered." As they see it, intrinsic to prostitution are the following numerous violations of human rights: "sexual harassment, economic servitude, educational deprivation, job discrimination, domestic violence, racism, classism, vulnerability to frequent physical and sexual assault, and being subjected to body invasions which are equivalent to torture" (Farley and Kelly, 2000: 29).

In literature, women who sell sex are often depicted in extreme contrast either as pitiable or glamorous personalities. Commenting on the central prostitute figures in the western literary tradition, for instance, Michèle Roberts observes that "in *Measure for Measure*, William Shakespeare underlined the virgin/whore dichotomy by juxtaposing the convent and the brothel, both institutions that contained and controlled women."<sup>3</sup> *Measure for Measure* unveils Shakespeare's recognition of the official morality of his time when prostitutes were adjudged to be morally deficient and were unable to interact with people who were considered to be morally upright. Examples of morally upright women were those in the convent. Further, explaining how novels acted as etiquette books (the conduct required by good breeding or prescribed by authority to be observed in social or official life) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Roberts recalls that in Jane Austen's strictly ordered world, "a young woman who bears an illegitimate child - such as Eliza in *Sense and Sensibility* - sinks further and vanishes." Even though "Dickens sympathised with young women forced into prostitution through poverty and tried to help them," Roberts notes, "he could not actually name Nancy's occupation in *Oliver Twist*."

Along the same lines of thought, the sentimental literature crafted during the Victorian period - in England - presents prostitutes as victims, as human commodities consumed and dumped like trash when they were used up. Citing Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* with its heavy emphasis on the purity of women as a representative novel of the said period, Nwahunanya

<sup>3</sup> See Michèle Roberts, "The Fallen Woman: Prostitution in Literature." <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/14/the-fallen-woman-prostitution-in-literature>. Consulted on May 10, 2022.



(2011: 340-1) recalls that “the prostitute was portrayed as soiled, corrupted and in need of cleansing.”

*The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* tags prostitution as a flourishing trade in the Middle Ages when licensed brothels were a source of revenue to municipalities. Indeed, prostitution “employed a significant proportion of the population and represented one of the top levels of economic activity” in the important cities of ancient Greece (Nwahunanya, 2011: 340). Allowing prostitution to take its own course without legal restrictions, the ancient Greek world incorporated this trade into the finances of the city-state through taxation. Anyway, Kapparis’ previously referenced study pinpoints the economic value of prostitution throughout history:

The world-wide net value of prostitution would be impossible to calculate, since its illegal status in many countries means that no reliable financial records exist. A recent estimate found that the world-wide worth of prostitution compared with other recreational activities is only second to that of alcohol and addictive drugs, about three times higher than that of the world-wide film industry, sixteen times higher than the net value of the entire tourism industry and over 20 times the value of the music industry. Even if one were to question the accuracy of these figures, the fact remains that there has been no society ever in history where prostitution did not exist in some form or shape, despite legal, social and religious sanctions. Countless people throughout history have been willing to serve the sexual needs of others for payment, either as prostitutes or as procurers, and even larger numbers were forced by someone other than the client to do so for profit. Economics have driven the industry of prostitution in every human society, often in defiance of strict laws, powerful social conventions or religious condemnation.

Indeed, prostitution contributed an important share to the economy of the Roman world (McGinn, 2010) and still contributes “significantly to the sustenance of the broader world economy” (Aderinto, 2017: 108). Driven by economic imperatives, then, sex work has grown increasingly to the present. With its ever-growing character and despite its morally and religiously reprehensible nature, eradicating prostitution is a mere absurdity, a titanic task which has prompted some governments to police it, instead (Weitzer, 2012; Lee, 2013). As William W. Sanger’s monumental research into the topic has proven (2013: 19-20), strenuous and well-directed efforts to outlaw the practice have been made at different times to no avail:

The whole power of the Church, where it possessed not merely a spiritual, but an actual secular arm, has been in vain directed against it. Nature defied the mandates of the clergy, and the threatened punishments of an after-life were futile to deter men from seeking, and women from granting, sinful pleasures in this world. Monarchs victorious in the field and unsurpassed in the council-chamber have bent all their energies of will, and brought all the aids of power to crush it out, but to no avail. The guilty women have been banished, scourged, branded, executed; their partners have been subjected to the same punishment; held up to public opinion as immoral; denuded of their civil rights; have seen their offenses visited upon their families; have been led to the stake, the gibbet, and the block, and still prostitution exists. The teachings of morality and virtue have been powerless here.



Obviously, as Kapparis reasons in light of the complexity of economic patterns of venal sex in relation to legal, social, cultural, political, ideological, and religious factors, "When someone is willing to pay handsomely for a service, someone else will always be willing to provide this service." This rationale explicates "why any and all attempts by individuals or groups to eradicate prostitution have failed without exception." Outlawing prostitution definitely remains a daunting task, in light of its longevity (Scott, 1954; Bassermann, 1988; Roberts, 1992; Garcia et al., 2017). If anything, the long history behind this phenomenon has proven its improbable suppression, so much so that it has become one of the most alarming problems plaguing city life in post-colonial Africa. As John S. Mbiti (1969: 226) aptly comments, "Prostitution is to be found in every African city and town, this being particularly an economic necessity or convenience for women since it helps them to earn some money, find somewhere to live and meet some of the demands of city life."

Paradoxically, however, although it takes two to tango, this social ill thrives on double standards. Truly, prostitution requires a buyer and a seller. Now, while acknowledging that both females and males can prostitute themselves and that most prostitutes are likely women and most clients men, why is its practice commonly associated with the female folk alone? If male customers "have been subjected to the same punishment, held up to public opinion as immoral and denuded of their civil rights," as Williams' previously referenced study claims, why does society scapegoat only women who sell sex and not men who buy it? Why are they solely singled out, blamed and criminalised when it comes to righting this social evil?

For Nwahunanya (2011: 340), this pejorative attitude to prostitution arises from stereotyped social attitudes towards women, prudery and the double standards which men have used to operate throughout history. Tracing these double standards back to the closure of brothels in England with the arrest of 8,600 female prostitutes, leading to the dissemination of street prostitution by the late 1880s, Nwahunanya incriminates the Victorians, great prudes with unparalleled moral duplicity regarding sexual relationships. Therefore, only women prostitutes were arrested in England in the fight against what was dubbed "The Great Social Evil," beginning from the 1840s. Men clients were left free and loose, reminiscent of Herster Prynne's case in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Scarlet Letter*, where only the woman is reprehended for an adulterous act she committed with a male partner in crime/sin. Replicating the biblical scenario of the adulterous woman who was dragged to Jesus and was on the verge of being stoned to death, the United States typically applies the same double standards while addressing the practice, to trust Melissa Farley and Vanessa Kelly (2000: 24; italics in original): "In most parts of the USA, prostitution is a criminal act.



Yet there has been a hugely disparate arrest rate of women in prostitution, compared to arrests of johns." In focusing on the prostituted woman "rather than on predatory behaviors of pimps and johns [men]," Farley and Kelly charge, "The *demand* side of prostitution has been largely ignored." In sum, simultaneously arresting female prostitutes and ignoring male customers is unfair and discriminatory toward women.

Prostitution occurs in a variety of settings. In street prostitution, the prostitute solicits customers while walking alongside a street or waiting at street corners, visible but possibly only at a certain time during the day. Prostitution also takes place in some massage parlors, identified as such. Solicitation is done at bars where it is more out in the open. Night-clubs, brothels or sex-clubs are establishments specifically dedicated to prostitution. Equally, it can happen at the prostitute's apartment or in a rented room when solicitation of [clients](#) is done from behind windows or through advertising. In escort or out-call prostitution, the customer calls an agency and the act takes place at his residence or more conveniently at his hotel room, to reduce direct visibility.<sup>4</sup>

The previous paragraph specifies prostitution facilities, places where the trade occurs. It is striking that all these settings are located in the city: streets, massage parlors, bars, brothels, night-clubs, sex-clubs, apartments, escort agencies, hotel and rented rooms are all features of the city. Explicitly, this long list incriminates the city as a breeding ground for prostitution, the subject of the next section.

## 2. City: A Breeding Ground for Prostitution

Mbiti's previous observation ties prostitution to city, presenting it as a mandatory activity for some women who are striving to meet some of the demands of city life. Clearly, Mbiti posits the city as a breeding ground for prostitution. It cannot be otherwise for Nwahunanya (2011: 341): "The anonymity of the city led to a large increase in prostitution, and unsanctioned sexual relationships." No wonder that most writers associate prostitution with the mechanisation and industrialisation of modern life, thereby representing this theme in relation to the city and to economic factors.

The city is a dreamed place for women as it provides them with formal positions. They are able to hold here jobs that were previously men's turf. So, while some educated women can compete with men on certain formal levels in the novel, the city equally offers illiterate women opportunities to work as department store's assistants, among others. However, some of these unskilled

<sup>4</sup> See "Prostitution, Migration and Urban Territory," at <https://www.mascontext.com/issues/10-conflict-summer-11/prostitution-migration-and-urban-territory/>. Consulted on June 5, 2021.



women workers are confronted with unmerciful situations. For that matter, Ekwensi contrasts Lagos to the rural community of Ogbu – where Jagua hails from – to highlight the pervasive role of the city in changing women's behaviour. The novelist incriminates materialism which pushes women to prostitution alongside the city's erotic atmosphere on its dwellers: "That driving, voluptuous and lustful element which existed in the very air of Lagos, that something which awakened the sleeping sexual instincts in all men and women and turned them into animals always on heat, it was not present here [in Ogbu]."<sup>5</sup>

The pornographic mood of the city enchains its inhabitants and completely changes their nature. Both the pornographic and fashionable influences of the city have metamorphosed its females into goods, since most "women are used as commodities in the materialistic world where money is supposed to buy anything" (Hacini, 2019: 51). Clearly, women like Jagua are degraded to sexual objects to the point of becoming "the property of men like the three in the room" (JN, 31-2), because these men are rich enough to purchase them.

Prostitution is, unavoidably, an outcome of modernisation. Not only does the city bring the belief in freedom of behaviour, but it equally puts pressure on its residents to gain fast money for survival. Additionally and as is previously touched upon, it provides facilities for prostitution to thrive and flourish. To argue the city as the driving force behind prostitution, it is enough to note that the idea of being in random love affairs is not new to Jagua, because back in Ogbu when girls her age had legal husbands, "She considered herself above the local boys, most of whom she had bedded and despised as poor experience" (JN, 166). She did not prostitute herself in her village, since she received no monetary reward in exchange for love-making. However, the city brought a drastic change to all that: the urge to make ends meet commands so in *Jagua Nana*, a synopsis of which follows.

Ekwensi's eponymous novel chronicles the escapades of a middle-aged Nigerian prostitute, Jagua, in the permissive city of Lagos. This ambitious, strong, independent and bipolar character is born in a religiously conservative family and raised in the countryside by her father, David Obi, a catechist who later becomes a pastor of the local church.

She has the misfortune of experiencing childlessness in her marriage. Narrated through a flashback in the novel, this setback jumpstarts her desire to live in a place where it will not be odd to be wandering about. This newfound will is

<sup>5</sup> Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (London: Heinemann, 1961), 180. Subsequent quotes are from this edition, with page numbers parenthetically included in the essay, and preceded by JN.



instrumental in her choice of Lagos as a place where “anyone who cared could go roaming the streets or wandering from one night spot to the other right up till morning” (JN, 167-8).

The above misfortune grounds her decision to relocate to Lagos where she begins to seduce and capture man after man, young, old, educated, unlettered, including die-hard criminals; Jagua’s image of the prostitute is larger than life, as she becomes a frontline member of a popular night-club – the *Tropicana*. Altogether, she spends ten years in Lagos; but they appear to be wasted years because she ultimately has nothing to show as reward from the trade to which she has devoted many of her active years. The last few months of her stay in Lagos are most degrading: Jagua lives as a squatter with a younger prostitute in the most slumming of Lagosian slums where she sometimes sleeps on the “bare floor which came off in powdery puffs” (JN, 165). By the time she is to leave Lagos for Ogabu, the very place against which she turned her back ten years earlier, she has to “go round her former friends [...] to borrow some money” (JN, 175) to enable her to undertake the journey.

She is contradicted on many levels. Despite her relatively old age, she follows the fashion, puts make-up, adopts a lustful lifestyle and gets involved in many relationships with men from different backgrounds and age groups. Jagua is fond of music and attends night-clubs which are the natural habitat for a prostitute. She is physically attractive and loves to receive attention to her body and style.

As is already known, Jagua is not originally from Lagos. Like so many Lagosians, she migrates from her village following her thirst for freedom. Her moving from countryside to the post-colonial modern city of Lagos introduces her to unpleasant events and links her to many urbanites. Before moving to Lagos, she had an attractive preconceived image of the city life with restaurants serving the most delicious food, women following fashion and people spending the night out having fun and enjoying their time. Prior to her relocating to Africa’s most populous city, Jagua Nana was just Nana in Ogabu, but she earns the nickname Jagua “after the famous British prestige car” (JN, 5) in Lagos, a nickname indicating not only prestige and fashion but a rebellious spirit as well. Rebelling against her community’s rules and customs, she follows a lifestyle different from the style of the village girls:

Jagua was fond of changing her clothes often, and – in those early days of make-up – of painting her face. Every few hours she went down to the waterside and took off her clothes and swam in the clean cool water. The boys used to hide and peep at her breasts and hips. She knew it and always teased them. (JN, 166)

A self-professed prostitute figure described by Grace I. Achufusi (in Nwahunanya, 2011: 344) as “the greatest courtesan and prostitute of all,” Jagua,



the prototype of all prostitutes, is an actual prostitute who defies the mold of an inadvertent prostitute. While an actual prostitute intentionally performs this role, an inadvertent one engages in sexual activities in a manner that bends her life towards prostitution but she struggles to keep these engagements in check. Clearly, an inadvertent prostitute tries to exercise restraint, or in some cases, she is totally unaware that her well-intentioned sexual activities amount to prostitution. In this regard, Jagua is an actual prostitute as she consciously, voluntarily, and commercially sells sex in exchange for money and other favors, to paraphrase Akande (2019).

Jagua loves sex, delights in admiring her body, and enjoys sampling men in bed and comparing their sexual prowess. Additionally, she likes to dress fine and swim in "clean cool water" to the admiration of men who "drew to her side and wanted her" (JN, 166). From the time she lives in the village to her sojourn first in the city of Enugu and later in Lagos, Jagua has always been preoccupied with thoughts of breaking free and living loose. Her Lagosian picture is even telling: "She had heard of Lagos where the girls were glossy, worked in offices like the men, danced, smoked, wore high-heeled shoes and narrow slacks, and were 'free' and 'fast' with their favours. She heard that the people in Lagos did not have to go to bed at eight o'clock" (JN, 167).

Realising that her ways are too provincial and outdated once in Lagos, she rapidly acquires a new sense of fashion, in the first place. Next and like all Lagosians do, Jagua changes her way of speaking to have a sense of anonymity. She starts talking in Pidgin English to avoid clan and custom markers: "Like Freddie she was an Ibo from Eastern Nigerian, but when she spoke to him she always used pidgin English, because living in Lagos City they did not want too many embarrassing reminders of clan or custom" (JN, 5). And most importantly, she realises that living the luxurious life she has always dreamed of cannot be easily achieved. Hence, she becomes one of the "many others (who) were practically strangers in a town where all came to make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money" (JN, 5-6).

In Lagos, Jagua lives in a single room in a slum and takes great pride and delight in entertaining and attending to the sexual needs of her numerous clients in the apartment which is usually paid for and furnished by a client. Thus, she meets the definition of the intentional professional prostitute who indulges in prostitution as a lucrative trade.

When she is newly relocated to Lagos, Jagua makes of the *Tropicana* night-club her business base where this ageing prostitute meets her customers: "At forty five, she had her figure and her tact to guide her. [...]. Seen under the dim lights



of her favourite night spot, the *Tropicana* – and from a distance – her face looked beautiful” (JN, 6). Described in the novel as a “super sex market” (JN, 12), the *Tropicana* night-club is both a representation of the whole city of Lagos and the urban structure where one can understand how prostitution functions.

Night-clubs deploys two artifices to promote the prostitution trade: music and fashion. While the Jazz music arouses Jagua’s sexual instincts, making her feel “genuinely elated” (JN, 13), fashion helps the trade to prosper, as it discards moral standards and abhors no horrible show. Thus, degrading scenes are exhibited for [their](#) sake, with Jagua as the perfect illustration: “She painted her face and lifted her breasts and exposed what must be concealed and concealed what must be exposed” (JN, 6).

Most girls and women dress in the same way, like Jagua, nowadays. Another character serving as a fitting illustration of this statement is drawn from *Jagua Nana’s Daughter*: Kate. The novelist portrays her in a particular way: “Auntie Kate was usually dressed like a film star, in pale blue or bright red or jade green, and her outfit was always European. She seldom wore Accra cloth or george or lace or any of the other traditional attires, though it would have suited her marvelously.”<sup>6</sup> A fashion destined to ensnare men who are unable to tame their lust.

Men being held responsible, in one way or the other, of the precarious situation of women, they become, in their turn, prostitutes’ targets, prostitutes who bring them havoc. Their desire to attract men prompts their wearing of undersized dresses “so that buttocks and breasts jutted grotesquely above the general contours of the bodies because a dress succeeded if it made men’s eyes ogle hungrily in modern sex-market” (JN, 13). The ethnic diversity of this post-colonial city which allows night-clubs to provide different types of women equally launches competition over lust and money. Therefore, women’s wearing provocative dresses has a set goal: seducing rich men. Ultimately, the more women entice men, the more night-clubs and prostitution trade prosper with various classes of prostitutes driving this business.

In an analysis of Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle’s *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature*, Nwahunanya (2011: 343-4) provides the following breakdown of the classes of prostitutes: the bitch-witch, the *femme fatale*, the weak-but-wonderful prostitute, the saved prostitute, the seduced-and-abandoned prostitute, the hapless harlot, the proud-pro-through-less-popular and the cast-of-thousands. While the bitch-witch embodies wickedness and cruelty, the seductress leading others to ruin or death, the *femme fatale*

<sup>6</sup> Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana’s Daughter* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1986), 73. Subsequent quotes are from this edition, with page numbers parenthetically included in the essay, and preceded by JND.



resembles the bitch-witch, except that her seductive qualities outweigh her evil ones. Despite her profession, the weak-but-wonderful prostitute is the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold, often humane, loving, even innocent. The saved prostitute is essentially a virtuous woman who is redeemed from her profession. Any man who risks his reputation to save her usually brings about the conversion. Jagua and Liza are apt examples of this class. The seduced-and-abandoned prostitute suffers a loss of virginity that leads her to a life in the streets, while the hapless harlot is "an uncared for victim of society [who] is forced by misfortune and poverty into her degrading work." She cannot be "rescued from her situation, nor does she transform an unsatisfactory life into a tolerable one by her kindness or strength of character like the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold." Lastly, while the proud-pro-through-less-popular is "the prostitute-turned-entrepreneur, the woman who builds a successful business around her trade," the cast-of-thousands are "those prostitutes who sometimes enter as nameless, faceless groups [...] They function as foils for more important characters, typify the debased social setting in which they practice their trade, or represent the valueless life" (Horn and Pringle, 1984: 5).

The above eight (8) various classes of prostitutes complement the British sociologist Kenneth L. Little's classification of types of girls available in the sex market (1980). For this sociologist, urban female prostitutes in African literature fall under three categories: "good-time girls/club girls," "street girls/streetwalkers," and "free women." So, these expressions are applied herein to describe the types of urban prostitutes dwelling in Ekwensi's fiction.

Club girls/good-time girls top the list. This category of girls basically [visits](#) night-clubs every evening to ensnare men. They sleep all day and begin their activities at night. The following comment about Kate by one of her friends bursts her into that category: "She still sleeping. She take day make night. When everybody sleep, den she go wake up!" (JND, 77).

*Tropicana*, this famous night-club in *Jagua Nana*, is a place where one can meet every category of good-time girls, varying in skin tone: "Pure ebony, half caste, Asiatic, even white...There were girls here and women to suit all men's tastes" (JN, 14). This diversity of women hailing from all over the world is not only mindboggling but makes the place very attractive to "women hunters," who have a variety of prostitutes to choose from, skin-wise.

On top of all, the club is a place of sexual immorality. Dealers in female flesh collect easy girls from this dancing, drinking, and smoking venue fraught with all kinds of prostitutes: a morally repulsive place, in sum. Clearly, no taboo is known to this place which disallows social barriers, an observation that might have drawn this comment from Donatus Ibe Nwoga and Stan O. Aibieyi (1978:



133): “The night clubs break the barriers between ethnic groups, bringing together men and women who, for a few hours, meet on equal terms, to respond to the message of the trumpets, saxophones and drums.”

But both *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter* are rife with streetwalkers as well. Streetwalkers are women/girls who walk along the road side purporting to catch some “fish.” Freddie, Jagua’s lover, can withstand everything but hearing that she walks along the street is unbearable to him. Despite Jagua’s flat denial of the fact, his conversation with the latter reveals her preference for foreigners – the white man/the big fish – for fat money: “Ah hear dat you use to walka on de road for night time. Den white man will pick you up and you follow him an’ sleep” (JN, 47). Obviously, some prostitutes prefer white men, assuming they can pay well. So, their dearest wishes are to come across a white man when standing along the road. Even though Jagua denies walking along the street for any prostitution-related purpose, she and other club women are accustomed to that business. Most of them prefer to walk on the road to catch some preys when the night-club is empty. Whenever the *Tropicana* was “poor company,” these club women will honestly advise Jagua to “walk along this road and the men would stop their cars and start up conversation” (JN, 49). When the “trade was bad” in the night-club, they would brief her, “all she needed to do was” to take to the street. No other alternative is foreseeable under those circumstances, for them. Clearly, the scarcity of men therein drives their walking the street in search of any prey. Because they are bold and mean business, they make the first move when no “customer” is available.

Jagua is not a lone sex worker in the novel under scrutiny: almost all women characters are prostitutes: Jagua, Rosa, Ma Nancy, etc. In fact, for them, prostituting themselves is their “bread and butter” (JN, 14). Since city women understand that their bodies can be used to change their situation, they do not mix feelings with “trade” (Clement, 2006; Settle, 2016; Garcia et al., 2017). Jagua’s following declaration locates the importance of money in the industrialised modern city to the point that human connections and feelings become of a minor priority: “in the *Tropicana*, money always claimed first loyalty” (JN, 15). Thus, although Freddie is her true love, he is relegated to “second loyalty.”

Prostitution is an economic plan: it provides sustenance for city women to make it in the industrial post-colonial city system. Through the novel, these women talk openly about prostitution, using “trade” and “business” in many passages. Actually, this trade is neither limited to Lagos, nor to fiction alone. The phenomenon has high-jacked every African city – especially the capital cities – where prostitutes would stand in front of some hotels, chasing men. Of Jagua, a



habitué of the street, a customer observes: "I - I always see you standin' here - every night when I'm going home" (JN, 51).

The foregoing definitely locates Jagua as a veteran streetwalker. When she first came to Lagos, she lived with a young bandleader who hosted her for a time. But her dreamed image of the city as the Promised Land is immediately shattered by the cruel nature of the city when it comes to making a living. To earn money, Jagua breaks away from this bandleader and starts walking down the street. Thus, the first procurers - commissioned men - apostrophe her, wondering if she could come and entertain their master, a white man who "jus' come out from England" (JN, 169). This seems the launching point of her prostitution career in town.

At times, outsiders/westerners who come to Africa keep local women to satisfy their sexual needs. Although the narration does not clearly identify Kate as a streetwalker, she has a particular preference for white men: "People soon knew that Kate Nene was the mistress of the particular man, that he was said to be a tin miner who had his abode somewhere in the Pankshin hills near the mines and outside Jos township" (JND, 74). But Ekwensi equally addresses a third category of these women: free women.

Known as *femmes libres* in the Francophone countries, free women are beautiful, physically attractive, economically dependable and socially independent. Living by their own and having neither a husband nor a family to take care of, they lead a kind of immoral life. They are the types of Kate who rent a house to receive men: "In Auntie Kate's parlour, the carpet was thick under the feet. The side boards were filled with crockery decorated in the oriental manner" (JND, 77-78). For others, like Jagua, men rent their room for them and the latter are ready to satisfy their lovers' least desire: "She must have satisfied him for he took a room for her and furnished it, maintaining it till he went on leave" (JN, 169).

Some of these free women are single mothers raising children by themselves. As is the case of Jagua's daughter, Liza, who has Saka Jojo as lover, these free women are available to entertain men. They accept to be mistresses outside and those men - even polygamous ones - can come at any moment of the day to satisfy their sexual needs. As the dialogue below abundantly sheds light on it, Saka Jojo can come to see Liza at any time for all his needs because he seemed unsatisfied with his three wives:

- "I'm not your *wife* ...Three wives should be enough to satisfy any sex maniac."
- It's not everywhere I can go at 12 midnight and feel free to eat. [...] He pulled her nearer and she submitted freely. He took her passionately and



insatiably, again and again, with the same uncontrolled hunger he had shown over his food (JND, 11-12).

As the above implies, this relationship between Liza and Saka Jojo pictures prostitutes' self-image as home pacifiers or "spare tires," being used to resolve marital conflicts in overheated homes where husbands would like to reduce stress (and let off steam) without having to always quarrel with their wives. Though some prostitutes may become permanent girlfriends to men who always run to the haven provided by them for relief, their relation is very casual: both "lovers" are not bound to each other and can have other occasional partners - boyfriends and girlfriends - as they wish. This situation happens because these women want to be loved, on the one hand, and they need dependable providers of their needs, on the other - in case the lover is not rich. A rational behind Jagua's having Freddie as lover and her seeing other men on the ground that the poverty-stricken Freddie is unable to meet all flashy demands required to satisfy her expensive lifestyle. Because Freddie could not spoil his fashion-lover and coquettish woman, Jagua takes money from the other men in exchange for sexual affection:

Freddie came back and threw her an angry glance. 'Get up, Jagua, an' let's go!' he scowled. He was all tensed up. 'Why now, Freddie? Sid down and greet de gentleman,' she said lazily. 'We only just come and he dyin' to meet you.' 'Le's go home, I said.' He glared at the Syrian who calmly offered Jagua another cigarette. Jagua took it. This was her bread and butter. The Syrian's money would buy her that new dress from Kingsway. She had already pictured herself in it. She loved Freddie well, but his whole salary could not buy that dress. He must understand that taking money from the Syrian did not mean she loved him less (JN, 15).

Like Jagua, Kate trades men at will, with a special taste for white men. Even when Bebe Jagua meets her at a reception some years later, she was still accompanied by a white man: "Look at her, still selling herself at her age. See the young white man beside her" (JND, 5). Reminiscent of the age gap between Jagua and her twenty-five years old poor but ambitious English teacher Freddie, the age difference between Kate and the young white man under consideration stinks. As is the case of both Kate and Jagua herself who "did not often remember that if her son had lived he would today be roughly as old as her lover," some of these free women prefer young "blood" for sexual satisfaction (JN, 6). It is an anathema, in Africa, for an old woman to be seeing a younger man. This scandalous show speaks loudly about "the utter moral degeneracy of present day Nigeria, especially in matters of sex," to use Nwoga's formulation (1978: 139).  
Moreover, Ekwensi mesmerises the readership with another type of prostitution: sexual slavery/exploitation, the focus of the next seven (7) paragraphs.

Supprimé: ¶



Sexual slavery is attaching the right of ownership over an individual with the intent of coercing him/her to engage in sexual relations. Any non-consensual sexual activity or forced prostitution qualifies as sexual exploitation. Mark Klamberg offers the following definition of it in his commentary on the Rome Statute:

Sexual slavery is a particular form of enslavement which includes limitations on one's autonomy, freedom of movement and power to decide matters relating to one's sexual activity [...]. Forms of sexual slavery can, for example, be practices such as the detention of women in "rape camps" or "comfort stations", forced temporary "marriages" to soldiers and other practices involving the treatment of women as chattel, and as such, violations of the peremptory norm prohibiting slavery.<sup>7</sup>

The glossary of prostitution includes sex enslaver, entailing someone who owns girls, sells their bodies and, in turn, receives money from this activity. Kate, a sex enslaver and pimp, represents this type of prostitution depicted in *Jagua Nana's Daughter* where the novelist shows how sexual exploitation can be used for monetary gain by a third party. A matron prostitute who engages young girls, houses them and "delivers" them to men who need their services, Kate definitely ranks as a first-rate sex trafficker and a *merchant of flesh*, to use Ifeoma Chinwuba's novel title (2003).

Sex trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons who under threat, force, fraud, deception or abuse of power are sexually exploited for the financial gain of another. Coercing an individual to perform a commercial sex act qualifies as sex trafficking.

Worldwide, traffickers use false promises to bait and enslave their victims – both adults and minors. Countryside populations and those who live in abject poverty are economically and politically marginalised. Thus, most lack rights and access to basic services, making them particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, for instance, poverty and the absence of sound education and naivety combine to turn Elewa into a tool for sexual subjection. Having little education entails her getting only a low-paying job like a sales girl. Obviously, she needs financial support, which her uneducated, sick, and old mother cannot provide. Consequently, her decision to cling to Ikem which, in turn, bends her life towards subtle prostitution because of the financial assistance Ikem provides. The disagreement over money between her mother and uncle during the naming ceremony of her daughter is indicative of the abject poverty of Elewa's family. Equally and on the account of

<sup>7</sup> Collected from Trafficking in America Task Force website at <https://traffickinginamericataskforce.org/sexual-slavery/>. Consulted on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020.



this poverty, another character, Beatrice, has to organise the naming ceremony of Elewa's baby girl. Further, Elewa's mother and uncle's bickering over the money collected at the event – with each one wanting to have a greater share of it – speaks volumes to their dire poverty.

As the above might imply, people from these disadvantaged communities are often offered false employment opportunities in major cities. While males therein are sent to towns to work on construction sites and houses with forced commercial sex acts as side dish, females are offered jobs as nannies, waitresses or dancers with hidden sexual agenda as well. Also, some traffickers operate under the guise of agencies that offer cross-country dating services. However, upon arrival, these individuals are abused, threatened and sold in the sex industry.

Often, traffickers keep victims under their control through intimidation, conditioning their freedom recovery with payment of their debt. The “debt” is supposedly incurred from the victims' recruitment, transportation, and upkeep. Thus, sex trafficking may occur within debt bondage/bonded labor. Its victims may eventually perform other functions, like recruiting or transporting other victims.

A pimp – or a sex trafficker – is usually a man. But in Ekwensi's fictional realm, the pimp is Kate, a woman who crosses the border to bring young girls from a neighbouring country: “Bringing them into the country had not been easy. Auntie Kate was worried about the escalating bribe she had to keep on paying at the border once the girls overstayed their visas” (JND, 206). These trafficked girls are taken to brothels, escort services, massage parlors, strip clubs, sex-clubs or hotels and are prostituted on the streets or coerced to participate in pornography. Actually, Kate makes them have sex with men and collects the money from them later. Thereafter, she leaves them destitute and travels. As the following conversation between Kate and Afua testifies to it, this scenario repeats itself incrementally, with Kate unduly collecting the hard money earned by the girls during her absence:

- She said, 'bring the money now.'
- Afua brought her some money in a bag. She counted it. 'Only three hundred naira! Since when do I leave you?'
- 'Madam, business hard. The men no dey spen' money again.' (JND, 206).

As stated before, their abject poverty and economic disadvantage make them easy preys. Thus, those innocent girls are “sold” by their parents because sex traffickers told them some bogus tales to convince them that their progeny will be maids, fairy stories quickly swallowed by these poor parents. This phenomenon is becoming rampant, as young girls are collected from West African villages after parents are told they will be maids in some Central



African nations. To seal the deal, these parents are given scant amounts of money to release their children as easy preys for city men.

Kate makes the girls her prototype. They become accustomed to night-clubs and prostitution. Once one of the girls informs her upon returning from another trip that "I dey go club dis night. Some white sailor men done come wit war-ship" (JND, 206), the reply of this professional sex trafficker is both shocking and telling about her mindset concerning sex and money-making: "Bring somethin' good. Na money ah want" (JND, 207). As Helen Chukwuma's following comment thoroughly unveils it, money definitely matters a lot to this veteran prostitute who initiated Jagua into the sex business (in Emenyonu, 1987: 69): "Jagua Nana (...) was an innocent teenager who fell under the wayward influence of Auntie Kate, a Cameroonian who lived off foreign miners. It was she who introduced Jagua to a life of promiscuity exposing her to her Greek friend Nick Papadopoulos for whom Jagua was to bear a daughter, a fact kept secret from the Greek." To a significant extent, then, moral values are strangers to prostitutes.

## CONCLUSION

Ekwensi's depiction of various shades of prostitution in both of his classic novels, *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter*, is unparalleled and right on the target. From an actual prostitute to an inadvertent one passing through a pimp or a sex trafficker, this pioneering author has prophesied the various tentacles of the prostitution trade in Africa years before its current development. Using his heroines - Jagua and Kate - as pretexts for exploring the "corrupting and brutalizing effect of urban life on the city dwellers," to remember Ernest Emenyonu (1987: 135), this trailblazer African novelist is a seer per his accurate painting of promiscuity and city life, his faithful picture of the matriarch and archetypal prostitute of African literature, his inaugurating the city-prostitution nexus, and his exploration of the noxious effects of the city on its residents - particularly on women - who have developed excessive sexuality in town. Leaving the solid protectiveness of rural life behind and facing the economic imperatives of city life, Ekwensi's urban women "can only progress through some degree of prostitution" (Nwoga, 1978: 139). Endowed with a capacity to alter its dwellers' patterns of behaviour thanks to its pornographic power and fashionable influence - added to its modern facilities - the city is a breeding ground for sexual depravity amid the abject poverty of its countryside females who have relocated therein. Unable to extricate themselves from its clutches, these females have opted to prostitute themselves - a very degrading living standard - literally becoming sexual objects for wealthy men to buy.



Definitely, the city resembles a jungle inhabited by many types of Jaguas and Kates who struggle to live through their bodies, by bartering their most coveted body parts. As Nwoga (1978: 136-137) has predicted it, sexual perversion is taking alarming proportions; it is skyrocketing as the onslaught of urban life on city residents keeps increasing with the passing of the ages:

Ekwensi's greatest indictment against present day Nigeria is that it is chaotic. [...] People seem so taken up with the pleasure that they ultimately lose the most coveted prize. [...] Ekwensi's female characters appear to be an embodiment of different types of vices as they tend to pervert everything from what is good in the service of unbridled and inordinate ambition to achieve prosperity.

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