Odeeokaa Journal of English and Literary Studies

Postcolonialism in Selected Nigerian Migration Novels

Amarachi Christiana Ejingini-Kelechi
Federal Polytechnic Nekede
Imo State, Nigeria

Odeeokaa Journal of English and Literary Studies, Vol. 1 No. 1. July, 2024

Abstract

The fast-growing trend in transnational migration has become one of the major subjects of postcolonial African literature. This surge in migration may be traced to the prevalent leadership flaws in various regions of the continent. In the Nigerian context, myriads of dissatisfying events arouse individuals with the daily desire to relocate to places with seemingly better chances for survival, especially outside Africa. Expectedly, Europe and America are usually the target locations. The irony is that the harsh outcomes of such relocation outweigh the envisaged benefits as majority of these migrants experience diverse forms of trauma and displacement. Based on this, they are left to either choose to remain there; accept and endure substandard living conditions or return home. Using the postcolonial theory, this work explores the intricate experiences of postcolonial migrants in the European and American societies as depicted in three Nigerian novels; Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street, Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah and Micheal Afenfia's Leave My Bones in Saskatoon. The work concludes that some African notions about the rosy life in the Western world are just mythical and that devising better means of alleviating life's difficulties in one's homeland is a good alternative to emigration.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Emigration, Migration Literature, Trauma, Displacement.

Introduction

The colonial experience obviously left a lasting impact in many parts of the African continent. In Nigeria, one finds a remarkable replay of the colonial tendencies in the political, social, economic and religious sectors of the society even after the exit of the western colonialists. Consequent on this, there is a generalized feeling of disappointment among citizens who initially expected the independence era as a harbinger of undeniable freedom for the people. Contrary to their dreams, the postcolonial society tends to produce multitudes of disheartening events which leave many individuals greatly hopeless and traumatized. The trauma experienced by most of these citizens result in the recent outburst in the quest for survival in other countries, especially European and American countries. Unfortunately, these are the countries of Africans' former colonizers.

Research reveals that the state of Nigeria in the 21st century tends to pose more frustrations for the citizens as there is a yearly increase in the rate of insecurity and ethnic disputes which replicate

the racism practiced by the colonialists, and other life-threatening issues. Therefore, there seems to be little or no difference between the colonial experience and that of the postcolonial era in Nigeria. On this note, Frances Oloidi and Ilechukwu Leonard remark that: "It seems ethnicity was a colonial heritage bequeathed to Nigeria at independence by the colonial masters. In effect, whatever damage ethnicity has generated in the process of governing Nigeria it could be traced to colonial arrangement" (5). The Nigerian society under these realities keeps becoming so uninhabitable that remaining in the country looks like choosing to die with both eyes open. This replication of the issues surrounding the colonial era which are being observed in the postcolonial administration of the nation draws the attention of writers and researchers from diverse perspectives.

Postcolonialism can be examined from two perspectives. It can be considered as a concept and as a period. As a concept, postcolonialism involves series of events and discourses which characterize the societies and cultures that were formally colonized. It covers their political, economic, social and religious lives even after the colonial experience with the western imperialists. When examined as a period, postcolonialism connotes the time or era after the disengagement and exit of the white colonialists from the formerly colonized nations. It entails the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of western colonialism (Duncan Ivison,1).

The three novels selected for this work portray characters with similar agitations and disenchantments over the undesirable aftermath of colonialism in their homeland. For these reasons, they decide to leave for other countries in search of better opportunities for a worthwhile living. In their host countries, they are faced with greater ordeals than the ones which influenced their migration decisions. As such, they have to either remain in their new locations, endure the harsh realities of being detached from their homeland or they return home. However, the uncertainties surrounding life at home remain the major reason for which they must strive to surmount the challenges of emigration. These three works are written by three Nigerian novelists in diaspora. Chika Unigwe is a Belgium-based Nigerian; Chimamanda Adichie is an American-based Nigerian, while Micheal Afenfia is a Canada-based Nigerian. Their novels have been selected for this research based on the fact that they portray experiences of characters from Africa, Europe and America.

Significantly, the three continents were linked many decades ago by a historic event which is colonialism. The colonial era incited a form of migration which was majorly forced emigration of the colonized from the African continent to the other two continents. However, the postcolonial events in some African countries like Nigeria have engendered another form of migration which involves individuals willingly moving to those continents which formerly exploited and marginalized their citizens in search of what their post independent societies could not offer them. This link between the three continents and the resurgence of the experiences which characterize such link form the basis for which the postcolonial theory has been chosen as a framework for this paper. Ann Dobie explains that the postcolonial theory offers topics of interest to members of the field because the formal termination of the colonial rule does not wipe out its legacy, and the culture that is left is a mixture of the colonized one and that of the colonizer, often marked by contrasts and antagonisms, resentment and blended practice (205-206).

Following the disengagement of the British from Nigeria in 1960, there have been several instances of social anomalies in the country. These anomalies include political turbulence, religious and ethnic disputes, a remarkable degeneration in social norms, gradual devaluation of the nation's

currency, a decline in the standard of education, high rate of unemployment, increase in the rate of poverty, insecurity, and so on. These factors mentioned above are the major reasons for the migration decisions taken by various characters in the three novels. Accounting for the relationship between these factors and emigration, Lanre Ikuteyijo explains that:

> Nigeria's economy and high levels of youth unemployment push people to seek better opportunities, jobs and security. The growth and development of any nation largely depends on its human capital development, often encapsulated in training and education. The public education system in Nigeria is fraught with regular episodes of industrial action by academic and allied workers. This contributes to a loss of confidence in institutions, and disruption in education. As a result, young people seek opportunities to study outside Nigeria (*UNESCO Courier*, 3).

The 21st century Nigerian society witnesses a yearly upward trend in the number of emigrants. This has generated myriads of discourses in various disciplines especially in literature. Migration which involves the movement of people from a former or original location to another location has therefore, become a predominant theme in many postcolonial Nigerian fiction, especially those written by Nigerians in the diaspora. In some of these literary works, one finds the writers' attempt to debunk the wrong notion that the European and American countries are paradise on earth.

Considering the abode of the writers at the time of writing and their thematic preoccupation, these novels can be categorized as migration novels. This is in line with the assertion by Katie Petterson that migration literature implies any work of art produced by immigrant authors and for a work of art to be considered as migration literature, it has to be produced by immigrants or their descendants (p.3). Migration literature often focuses on social contexts in the immigrants' country of origin which prompt them to leave, on the experience of migration itself, on the mixed reception which they may receive in the host country on arrival, on experiences of racism and hostility, and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity which can result from displacement and cultural diversity *(www.wikipedia.com*, 2024). All of these features of migrant literature are adequately depicted in the three novels chosen for this paper. This is because they all capture the social contexts in the postcolonial Nigerian society which influence the migration decisions of individuals.

Any literature is dominated by some themes and motifs which are generally related to the socio-political and economic atmosphere of its era (Kofi, 2). In line with this statement, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Adichie's *Americanah* and Afenfia's *Leave My Bones in Saskatoon* reflect the socio-political and economic concerns of the post-colonial era in Africa, with Nigeria as a major focus. They also reveal various ways in which these issues make the African migrants vulnerable to a new form of colonialism in the hands of their hosts as well as in the hands of their fellow Africans in diaspora.

Unigwe's novel tells the story of four African ladies; Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce. They leave their families and migrate to Belgium to escape from unemployment, poverty, broken relationship, sexual exploitation and other unpleasant conditions which surround their stay in their homeland. However, their arrival at Belgium subjects them to another form of colonialism from Madam, a fellow African who abuses and demeans them just because they have been trafficked to her for prostitution from which she makes money over there.

Poverty, unemployment and insecurity are well illustrated in the novel as the major influencing reasons for the characters' choice of migration. In Unigwe's novel, Efe accepts to travel to Antwerp for prostitution due to the harsh economic conditions in her family. Having lost her mother who died after a brief illness, she begins to lack the much-needed parental guidance. Her father does not even give her any attention. The narrator explains Efe's thoughts about her father:

> She could not remember the last time they'd had a proper conversation. Mostly, he yelled at them. "How long does it take for breakfast to be ready in this houseful of women? What does a man have to do to get food in his own house?" A normally loquacious man, given to long-winded talk, he became egregious after he had drunk a bit, picking fights on the way until he got home, bruised and battered. The children saw him some mornings when he got up for breakfast and work, and some nights, if they stayed up long enough, they heard him sing meaningless songs about soldiers and women (38).

Under this condition, Efe begins to live a wayward life. She engages in a relationship with a married man who impregnates her, abandoning her and her son. So, at the age of sixteen, she is already a single mother and is saddled with many responsibilities which include the ones his father should bear. "He left it up to Efe to look after the house and her three siblings, all of them younger than she was" (37). Efe does different types of jobs for which she often suffers body pains, she is faced with a pressing need to find another means of income, 'to see that she got a break from the scrimping and the cleaning and the tiredness that were taking over her life' (47). Thus, the offer of travelling to Belgium becomes a way out of her sufferings. When Dele asks her whether she will like to travel abroad, she presents her acceptance in form of a question to Dele:

> If I wan' go abroad, Oga Dele? Anybody dey ask pikin if de pikin wan' sweet? Who did not want to go abroad? … People knew the risks and people took them, because the destination was worth it. What was it the song said? *Nigeria jaga jaga*. *Everytin' scatter, scatter*. Nobody wanted to stay back unless they had pots of money to survive the country (47).

In the same novel, Ama suffers a regular sexual abuse within the family setting right from the age of eight. This becomes a reason she must leave for Antwerp in Belgium, as long as she is able to flee from such an atrocious man who rapes her every night even though she calls him father, and from her uncaring mother who does not bother to find out the source of her problems. Sisi's own situation is not even better. As a university graduate, she has become fed up with attending many interviews without being employed. She remains in the same worn-out rented apartment with her parents for so long that life now feels hopeless. So, Dele offers to take her abroad, in clear terms which make her understand that the migration implies engaging in prostitution overseas to make money. Dele's words flow in such derogatory terms:

> I get connections. Dat one no be your worry. As long as you dey ready to work, you go make am. You work hard and five hundred euros every month no go hard for you to pay. Every month, I send gals to Europe. Antwerp. Milan. Madrid. My gals dye there. Every month, four gals. Sometimes, five or more. You be fine gal now. *Abi*, see your backside, *kai*! Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest *nyansh*? Make dem come here, come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for chest, omo, how you no go fin' work? (29).

These words irritate Sisi so much that she begins to think of screaming and insulting Dele, 'to ask him what type of girl he thought she was' and to tell him, "Do you know that I have a university degree? Do you know I am a graduate?" (29). Contrarily, her intended response is weakened by the thoughts of her penurious family condition at the moment:

> Images flashed in front of her like pictures from a TV show: the living room with the pap-colored walls. A shared toilet with a cistern that never contained water; anyone wishing to use the latrine had to first of all fetch a bucket of water from the tap in the middle of the compound. A kitchen that did not belong to her family alone. Her father folded, trying to be invisible. Her mother's vacant eyes interested in nothing (29).

With these thoughts in her mind, Sisi quickly gulps in Dele's insults and accepts the offer. She quickly fabricates the false story which she tells her parents. They see this as a blessing and a dawn of hope for the family. So, they give her their blessings.

In Adichie's own novel, unemployment and the declining standard of education in Nigeria are depicted as the major postcolonial issues for which characters like Ifemelu, Aunty Uju, Dike her son, Obinze and other characters choose to travel out of Nigeria to America and United Kingdom. In their host countries, these characters are confronted by lack of good jobs, racial discrimination as a result of their skin color and financial challenges for which they choose to settle for lower standards of living so as to cope with life abroad. Some of these disparaging experiences require losing some aspects of their identities in order to be accepted by the people in their new abode and to survive the related pressures of living in an entirely new world. Afenfia's own novel depicts the predicaments of Owoicho and Ochanya his daughter who migrate from Nigeria to Canada as a result of insecurity and the need to improve their standards of living even after the loss of his wife and three children during an attack by armed bandits on their return from Maiduguri to Abuja

Adichie's narrative presents a character like Obinze whose major reason for migration to United Kingdom is unemployment. The narrator vividly refers to the numerous applications and the interviews which he attends without results:

> His job applications yielded nothing. He travelled to Lagos and to Port Harcourt and to Abuja to take assessment tests, which he found easy, and he attended interviews, answering questions fluidly, but then a long empty silence would follow. Some friends were getting jobs, people who did not have his second-class upper degree and did not speak English as well as he did. He wondered whether employers could smell his America-pining on his breath, or sense how obsessively he still looked at the websites of American universities (270).

With this experience, Obinze's migration to United Kingdom through his mother's research visa seems a potent means of easing his depression and mood swings. Although he feels disappointed that his mother has to falsify some details in her travel documents so as to add his name as her research assistant, he still accepts to utilize the opportunity. Thus, he reaches United Kingdom only to start facing the plights of being an illegal resident. Certainly, he has many other hurdles to surmount. Most of these hurdles are clearly more difficult than the unemployment which forces him out of Nigeria.

For Owoicho, the protagonist in Afenfia's novel, the issue of insecurity serves as the motivating factor for migrating to Canada. Although Owoicho's late wife is the pioneer of the relocation idea,

losing her and his three children in a gruesome killing by armed bandits necessitates hastening the process. In a phone conversation with Owoicho in which he investigates the details of his wife and children's death, Agbenu the journalist explains the real state of security in the nation:

> I was told they fled at the sound of the gunshots. You know, most times, the bandits, herdsmen, kidnappers, or whatever they are called, have more ammunitions than the police and soldiers, so they do what they consider the most sensible thing to do. I've heard of cases where policemen take off their uniforms and blend in with the villagers because they don't want to be identified and killed (36).

As David Jowitt asserts, "another theme which is becoming more prominent in the post-independence era is that of the disappointment by post-colonial government of popular hopes of better life for all" (361). As it concerns the postcolonial Nigerian government, the disappointment is expressed in Afenfia's novel by Alegwu. While congratulating Owoicho his friend on his success in getting a visa to travel abroad with his daughter, Alegwu confesses:

> I'm happy you found an escape route out of this country. It is the best thing any father can do for his child right now when it feels like the government isn't doing anything to make this country work again. Our leaders have no idea how to solve the many problems besetting us as a nation, and that's scary as hell (78).

Obviously, the novelist reveals that for a country where the security personnel are under-armed and the political leaders are confused, lacking the ability to solve problems as sensitive as the insecurity of people's lives and property; leaving for other countries becomes the wisest thing anyone can do.

The three novels therefore summarize the three major impediments of the postcolonial Nigerian society through the characters' experiences and confessions at various points. These three factors also form the reasons for which transnational migration is regarded by various individuals in contemporary times as a great achievement and an escape route out of the country. Thus, Chinua Achebe confesses that "the problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (1).

As Ann Dobie avers, "The subject matter of post-colonial literature is marked by its concern for ambiguity and loss of identity" (206). This loss of identity in Dobie's assertion manifests in the sense of displacement which often exists in the migrant's psyche. Characters in the three narratives are left with the inevitable choice of enduring various forms of displacement which arise from the process of their resettlement in various countries. Such displacement moves from the physical displacement to identity displacement, psychological, intellectual, and cultural displacement. In all these forms, the characters have some vital aspects of their lives to lose in order to surmount one challenge or another.

For the four young ladies in Unigwe's narrative, displacement begins even while they are still in their native land. First, the narrator reveals their displacement of identity as Dele their trafficker advises Chisom to change her name to Sisi and Alek is also told to change hers to Joyce, just to make them sound fanciful and acceptable in their expected new abode which is Antwerp. Sisi has no objection to this as she already feels frustrated by the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, so she is determined to travel abroad and make "enough disposable income" in Antwerp "even if it kills her" (67).

In addition, Ifemelu and Obinze in Adichie's *Americanah* have the options to displace their identity or remain jobless and helpless in their new environment. Thus, Ifemelu accepts to bear the name "Ngozi Okonkwo", she uses Ngozi Okonkwo's Social Security Card just to be able to get the job of a babysitter in America. Equally, Obinze changes his own name to "Vincent" and uses a National Insurance Number owned by Vincent in order to secure the menial job of a toilet cleaner and a warehouse boy. Worse still, he pays 40 percent of his salary to Vincent for using his name and card to secure and retain such a humiliating job. Unfortunately, these are jobs which these individuals would not have accepted in Nigeria. In a similar sense, Ginika another character in the novel starves herself so as to look like her American friends. She changes so drastically that Ifemelu begins to complain that: "there was a metallic, unfamiliar glamour in her gauntness, her olive skin, her short skirt that had risen up, barely covering her crotch, her straight-straight hair that she kept tucking behind her ears (87). Aunty Uju is not left out in the novel, she begins to pronounce her name as "You- joo" instead of "oo-joo" just to ensure that her name sounds acceptable in the American accent. She no longer cares whether such pronunciation gives her name the original meaning or not.

In Afenfia's novel, Owoicho the protagonist loses his identity back in Nigeria. In order to settle in Canada with his daughter, he accepts a rented basement from Bimpe and Damiete her husband. To survive the harsh conditions of life in such a strange world, he accepts to do some menial jobs like keeping the warehouse, which become his major source of income. Some of the jobs he manages to find are so demeaning that he even rejects them whereas, back in Nigeria, he is a famous TV star, a boss in his office and a man with many domestic servants who depend on him for their monthly salaries and survival. Thus, Owoicho's identity in Canada changes to that of a delivery man because that is the type job he can start with. The conditions around the job he does are vividly highlighted thus:

> He got a job as a deliveryman in one of the furniture companies in the city, Pope and Buchannan Homes. The job entailed loading furniture from the warehouse into a truck driven by another employee he was paired with and then dropping off the items at the buyer's home or office. He was given one day for his paperwork, and the second day was dedicated to training and orientation about his role and the company's policies and rules. Owoicho quit after three days of heavy lifting because his back hurts and he couldn't walk straight. His entire body felt like he was flogged with a two-by-four wood and left for dead (190).

Ironically, this same character is later considered good enough by his late wife's employer for a more prestigious appointment in Nigeria. Therefore, he is later employed to run a state-owned newspaper, radio and television station in Nigeria, a reason for which he accepts to return home. Possibly, Afenfia uses this instance to suggest that one major way to solve the upsurge in emigration in the postcolonial Nigerian society is by providing jobs for the citizens.

Furthermore, Bimpe perceives her loss of identity as a survival strategy in Canada and she willingly adopts it. So, she changes her name to Bree and is not even interested in being addressed the way female elders are addressed in Nigeria. In an enlightenment conversation with the young Ochanya who has just arrived Canada with her father, Bimpe clearly makes the following points:

> Okay, big girl, a couple of quick things. Here we don't say fire or cooker. We say stove. Another thing you must remember is that here in Canada, no one calls anyone aunty or uncle. People are addressed by their first name only, so please remove that

> aunty you say whenever you call me. I am not old. Finally, and this is very, very, very important, you and your father have been calling me 'Bimpe. My name is no longer Bimpe but Bree. That is what everyone calls me now, and I would appreciate it if you both did the same. Why Bree?... it's short for Briana, a name I gave myself when I got here and realized Bimpe wasn't doing it for me (157).

Explaining the tenets of postcolonial literature further, Dobie asserts: "Written by culturally displaced people, it investigates the clash of cultures in which one deems itself to be superior and imposes its own practices on the less powerful one (207). Based on this issue of superiority of one culture on the less powerful one that the western nations still relegate the black migrants in the countries, they perceive almost everything African as immaterial. Therefore, most postcolonial narratives mirror the varieties of relegation suffered by the African migrant through the experiences of their characters. Afenfia's work presents characters who suffer professional relegation. For this reason, their certificates are not considered significant and for which they are only employed in places where they do menial jobs which are quite lower than what they left in their home countries. Bimpe who used to be a teacher in Nigeria unveils the nature of her job in Canada to Owoicho who receives the news with great shock. She explains:

> I know I didn't say this to you when you were in Nigeria, but I work in a care home for the elderly. To put it simply, I bathe, wash, clean and feed the aged. Damiete works as a security guard in an apartment building in the city. It pays our bills, and we are happy doing these jobs here in Canada, but it isn't something we talk about with people back home in Nigeria. We just don't think they will understand why we accept to do these menial jobs, so we prefer not to talk about it unless they come over here and see things themselves, and then we don't have to hide anymore (160).

In addition, Bimpe's husband comments on his own job:

> I know I should quit this job and look for something in engineering, which is my field, but employers here don't recognize my non-Canadian qualification and experience. Someday, I hope to get an engineering certification or something, or even branch off into another field entirely, but I keep procrastinating. That is why for now, Owoicho, I have to take what I can get so we can pay the bills (161).

Having heard from his hosts in Canada, Owoicho realizes that his experience in the media and his university certificate will offer him nothing, he decides to keep such details away from his job application. So, "in the resume he submitted to the company, nothing was mentioned of his university education or his years in broadcasting. Instead, he stopped at secondary school qualification and fabricated a position as a furniture carrier in a non-existent furniture company in Abuja" (190).

Similar instances of relegation are experienced by Obinze, Aunty Uju and Ifemelu in Adichie's *Amercanah*. Obinze is a university graduate with a good grade yet in the United Kingdom, he stays jobless for a long time that he only has to accept the job of a toilet cleaner. The narrator gives a vivid description of Obinze's job in the following words:

> Everyone joked about people who went abroad to clean toilets, and so Obinze approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail, in an estate agent's office on the second floor of

> a London building… the toilets were not bad, some urine outside the urinal, some unfinished flushing (273).

For Aunty Uju in the same novel, the experience is that of professional and racial relegation. She is insulted by a patient and a pharmacist in the hospital where she works. Even though it is clear that she is acquainted with diverse health cases in her profession, the two individuals choose to debase her based on her skin color and accent. For this reason, she bursts out while relating her experience to Ifemelu:

> I don't even know why I came to this place. The other day, the pharmacist said that my accent was incomprehensible. Imagine, I called in a medicine and she actually told me that my accent is incomprehensible. And, as if somebody sent them, one patient, useless layabout with tattoos all over his body told me to go back to where I came from. All because I knew he was lying about being in pain and I refused to give him more pain medicine. Why do I have to take this rubbish? I blame Buhari and Babangida and Abacha, because they destroyed Nigeria (253).

These hurdles which the characters face in securing even the most demeaning jobs abroad explains the fact that Nigerian educational certificates and professionals are regarded as insignificant outside the country, even in the postcolonial era. This suggests a remarkable reinforcement of colonialism against the African race, where the African is simply regarded as worthless by the colonialists.

The migrant characters in the narratives are also subjected to psychological relegation at various points. In Unigwe's novel, Sisi's own case is that of psychological relegation. She is compelled by Madam to submit her international passport and fake being a Liberian at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When she asks why she should do so, Madam notifies her of how irrelevant she has become even in her own affairs, just because she has been sold to her by Dele the Nigerian human trafficker. Therefore, Sisi's question receives such a dehumanizing response from Madam:

> My dear Sisi, it's not in your place to ask questions here. You just do as you are told, and you'll have an easy ride. I talk, you listen. You understand? Three days ago, I gave Joyce the same instruction. She did not ask me questions. She just listened and did as she was told. I expect the same of you. Silence and total obedience. That's the rule of the house. Be seen, not heard (68).

In addition, Sisi is told to change her real background by claiming to be an asylum seeker who ran away from Liberia because her entire family members had been killed by terrorists who are also seeking to kill her. Madam instructs her:

> Tell them there that you are from Liberia. Are you listening to me? Tell them that your father was a local Mandigo chief, the soldiers loyal to Charles Taylor came at night to your house and killed your entire family: father, mother, sisters, and brothers. You escaped because you hid yourself in a kitchen cupboard. You dared to come out only after the massacre ended and the soldiers had gone. Tell them you heard a soldier shout that one family member was missing, that they were under obligation to kill you all, and that they would be back to do just that. Look sad. Cry. Wail. Tear your hair out (68).

For a migrant like Sisi, such a devastating instruction was only to be gulped and obeyed, not to be questioned, just as Madam had advised earlier. This goes further to display how some unscrupulous Nigerian migrants use the diaspora as an opportunity to marginalize their fellow Nigerians. Therefore, Sisi and other girls must slave for Madam to ensure that they meet up with the mandate of paying a minimum of one hundred Euros every month until they complete the total amount with which Madam purchased each of them. With this in their minds, it will not be smart for any of them to raise any objection to her rules; not even now that their passports have been confiscated and there is no other familiar place or face to run to, no other means of survival is in sight.

Having been disappointed by the flaws of their leaders who should have made life worthwhile for them in their homeland, the migrants become so uncertain about home that they choose to swallow any unsavory condition which their migration status offers them in their host countries. Based on this, Sisi only has to subdue her self-worth. Although she may be psychologically traumatized because of Madam's insolent manners, home is full of uncertainties so it is not even an option now that she is in Antwerp and really needs to play by the rules to make some money. The narrator reveals her state of mind thus: "Sisi detested Madam's tone, the way she spoke as if she were a child. Back in Lagos, nobody would have dared to talk to her in that manner. But this was not Lagos. She needed this woman's help in this city that was full of strangers". (68).

This underscores the servitude which the African migrants suffer even at the mercy of their fellow blacks who should have given them support in the struggle to adjust to the demands of their new life in a foreign country. Just for sake of the much-needed survival in a strange land, they must learn to forgo some values no matter how precious these values may be to them.

Thus, Ifemelu in *Americanah* receives pressures from different angles just to make her change her hair style which is regarded as archaic in her new environment. She receives regular castigation from Aunty Uju over her natural hair texture. She tells Ifemelu how much her hair looks like a jute. At the point of preparing for an interview at Baltimore, Ruth advises her firmly over the need to change her hair texture in order to succeed in the interview: "my only advice? Lose the braids and stretch your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job" (236). So, Ifemelu chooses acceptance over identity and by altering her preferred natural hair texture in order to suit the American values, she becomes psychologically traumatized. The narrator reveals:

> Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning of something organic dying, which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss (237).

On the other side; Curt, her American boyfriend tells her to shave her eyebrow to look more beautiful. She accepts to shave her eyebrow to avoid looking primitive. However, the acceptance to go shave her eyebrow is met with an insult from the lady at the spa, who tells her that they "don't do curly". Curly is a debasing name for the blacks in America. Aunty Uju also is so psychologically affected by the harsh financial status that she succumbs to the low standard of living in order to meet up in paying her bills and to adequately provide for her son's education. She even yearns and strives so hard to win the love of Bartholomew, a young man whom Ifemelu detests passionately. Reminding Aunty Uju about her self-worth while in Nigeria, she says: "in

Nigeria, a man like him would not even have the courage to talk to you" (140). But because of how desperate she is for survival in America, Aunty Uju does not even care to remember what identity she once had in Nigeria, she replies Ifemelu's remarks; "he's not bad, he has a good job. We are not in Nigeria, Ifem". (140). Aunty Uju's son Dike is also psychologically displaced by the unfriendly attitudes of people around him, especially in school. Therefore, with the notion that people with his skin color are not accepted in his world, he commits suicide.

The feelings that everything about them is disregarded by their native hosts and even their fellow black migrants lead these characters into choosing things which seem acceptable even at the expense of their real identity or values. At this point, they adopt the lifestyle of mimicry as another survival strategy. As Derick Mbungang posits:

> Mimicry has become an important concept in postcolonial literature as it has been used to describe the ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. In the postcolonial perspective, the colonized subject "mimics" the colonizer, adopting his cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values. The result is never a simple reproduction of those traits; rather, it is a "blurred copying" of the colonizer that can be quite threatening (1).

This concept of mimicry really influences the thought patterns of the migrant characters in the novels to the extent that they accept it as the right standard at the expense of their original personal or social values, to which they held strongly before migrating to other countries.

This is portrayed in Afenfia's novel through Bimpe's suggestion to Owoicho on how best to handle Ochanya's teenage misbehavior. She has just attempted snapping her nudity and sending it to someone in Nigeria. As Bimpe finds out and reports to Owoicho, the exasperated father threatens to punish her. However, Bimpe retorts:

> You know this is Canada and not Nigeria. You don't just shout at your children anyhow o. you will get into trouble. In fact, the worst thing you can do here is touch a child or dare get physical with even your own pikin. You may land yourself in a big problem. You can't hit her or scream at her or something like that. Here, you talk to them. It is called negotiating. You have a conversation (218).

The bewildered Owoicho questions the unreasonable imitation by questioning Bimpe and reminding her of the original Nigerian values of child training: "Who conversation help? Bree, have you forgotten how our parents brought us up? The old people will say, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'. Can't you see how we turned out? Or you think we didn't turn out fine?" (218).

Aunty Uju also exhibits mimicry in Adichie's *Americanah*. As she succeeds in her medical examination, she starts the preparation for her interview and the first thing which comes to her mind is removing her braids. She explains to Ifemelu: "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (142-43). The imitation seems blind and baseless to Ifemelu who questions, "So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?". Then Aunty Uju gives an answer which confirms that she does not even have any tangible knowledge of why she has to copy the Americans: "I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (143). These cases of mimicking what is done in the immigrant's host country portray the immigrant as a caged personality whose existence is no longer woven around his own choices and understanding but

around the values of the environment where he finds himself and where he must play along so as to succeed.

In conclusion, a close reading of the three selected novels in this paper unveils the downside of transnational migration for the African, especially Nigerians in the European and American continents. Written by Nigerians in the diaspora, these migration narratives reflect the replay of the colonial experiences of the African people; this time in a postcolonial era and in the native land of the former colonizers. As postcolonial writers, the novelists attempt to demystify the false assumption that the western world holds the solutions for the predicaments of the post-colonial African society. The works reveal the point that the Europeans and Americans still have their savagery intact when it comes to relating with the blacks; despite their physical exit from the African soil, a greater part of their insolence towards the African personality remains unchanged. Madam, the Belgium-based Nigerian human trafficker in Unigwe's fiction declares this clearly as she addresses Sisi, "White people enjoy sob stories. They love to hear about us killing each other, about us hacking off each other's heads in senseless ethnic conflicts. The more macabre the story, the better" (68). Obviously, through the motifs of these three works as in other migration fiction by Nigerian writers in the diaspora, there lie the predominant suggestions that migrating to the homeland of the former colonizers possibly creates room for a new form of colonialism which is even worse than the former. Recourse to striving for survival in one's homeland holds greater promises.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *The Problem with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1983.

Adichie, Chimamanda. N. *Americanah*. Lagos: Farafina, 2013.

Afenfia, Micheal. *Leave My Bones in Saskatoon*. Canada: Griots Lounge, 2023. Online.

Dobie, Ann. *Theory in Practice an Introduction to Literary Criticism*. U.S.A: Wadsworth, 2012.

Forster,Perez.R. "When Immigration Is Trauma: Guidelines for the Individual Clinician". *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71 (2), 2001. Online.

Iremeka, Chijioke. "Japa…Mass Emigration of Citizens that May Hurt Nigeria Further". *The Guardian Newspaper*. 10th September, 2022. Online.

Jowitt, David. *English Language and Literature in Historical Context*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2009.

Kattie, Petersen. *Migrant and Migration Literature*. Germany. www.yorku.ca., 15th March, 2024.

Koffi, Asaph. S. *Migrant Literature and the New Generation of African Writers.* Online.

Mbungang, Derick. J. "Mimicry in Samuel Sevon's *The Lonely Londoners* and J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians". Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History. Vol.1, No.1,* 2020. *https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org*>...

Oloidi, Frances. J. and Ilechukwu, Leonard. "Ethnicity in Nigeria in Post Colonial Era and Implications for Reader-Centered Library Collections". *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal*). 6924, 2021. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6924.

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