

When it no longer matters whom you love: the politics of love and identity in Nigerian migrant fiction

Ajibola Opeyemi¹
Department of English
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3094-1285>,
Email: ajibolaopeyemiwumi@gmail.com
Tel: +2348062420265

Abstract

A number of creative texts by Nigerian migrant writers recreate migrant characters' experiences of love, intimacy and connected identity politics in the diaspora. However, there is a paucity of scholarly engagements with Nigerian migrant writers' representation of the complexities that attend the formation and reconfiguration of migrant characters' identity and love relationships outside the motherland. This study, therefore, examines the intersection of love, place and identity in three purposively selected texts – Segun Afolabi's Goodbye Lucille, Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah and Unoma Azuah's Edible Bones. The three novels are closely read and analysed using the Postcolonial theory's conceptions of Othering and unhomeliness, in order to foreground the impact of the 'condition of the diaspora' on migrant characters' relationships and identity negotiations. The study reveals that all three novels feature characters that struggle to align their multiple identities and at the same time maintain meaningful love relationships outside the motherland. There is also the representation of same-sex marriages, green marriages, dysfunctional inter-national, inter-racial and transnational relationships, and the negative effects of distance on love relationships. Time and chance then determine the politics of love and identity in diasporic spaces. Nigerian migrant writers represent the pervasively unpleasant experiences of migrant characters belied in the construction of love with identity politics as coordinate relationships in the Nigerian diaspora, through a rhetoric pain and suffering, in order to underscore the unpleasant second side that there is to the migration narrative of bliss and fulfilment. Thus, they destabilise the hegemonic discourses around West-ward emigration as the panacea to African subjects' experience of postcolonial disillusionment, in an effort to write back, write right and write committedly.

Keywords: Nigerian migrant fiction, love and identity, the condition of the diaspora

Introduction

Rushdie (1991:277) commented that the migrant is perhaps the central defining figure of the twentieth century. This is because migrant writers and writings take centre stage not only in the contemporary Nigerian literary space but all across the literary canvas of world literature. Since many contemporary writers make their homes outside their motherland, thanks to globalisation which has fostered faster and safer means of transportation and communication, the preoccupation with migrant themes and techniques cuts across diverse national literatures. Frank (2008) submits that the 20th century has, like no other, witnessed large-scale migration across the globe, and this has made the migrant the main protagonist of the 20th century. In his estimation, events such as the two world wars, the countless regional and ethnic wars, the

1. Ajibola Opeyemi is a lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

processes of decolonization in many previously colonized states have all played a major role in bringing about the waves of migrants, refugees, and exiles that traversed the globe during the twentieth century. The large-scale migration has then led to the globalisation of the local and the localisation of the global, so much so that ‘the global permeates the local, while the local dissipates into the global; and the production of human identity is informed by new coordinates’ (Frank 2008:2).

Since every generation recreates its defining experiences in its literature (Diala 2011:11), and migration and its consequences constitute one of the defining realities in contemporary Africa, African writings thematise exile, migration, transnationalism, globalisation and so on. Sam Roberts, a journalist writing in *The New York Times* of 2005, asserts, based on immigration statistics, that more Africans have trooped into the United States in contemporary times than during all the years of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Loimeier (1997:58) argues that half of the writers that hail from Africa have lived abroad at one time or another, as students, exiles, researchers, migrants, refugees, professionals, etc. Seldom has history witnessed a greater large-scale international migration, especially North-ward, as it does in the present era. The recent migrant crisis has especially forced scholars and laymen, artists and critics to engage in the migration discourse to ascertain the dialectics of migration, migratory patterns and its consequences on people, spaces, and contexts.

In a sense, Modern African literature started with the writings of African slaves who were forcefully removed from their countries and transported through the Middle Passage to the Americas. Among these are James Albert alias Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, who wrote *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince Related by Himself* (1770), Ottobah Cugoano who wrote *The Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of Slavery and Commerce of the Hyman Species* (1787), and Olaudah Equiano who wrote *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, The African Slave, written by Himself* (1789). Other Africans who wrote poems and slave narratives include Phillis Wheatley, Francis Williams and Ignatius Sancho. These writers could be said to be the forebears of the current African writers resident in the diaspora. While the writings of the erstwhile slaves recreate the gory experiences of slavery – the capture, the journey through the Middle Passage, sales at auction blocks, attempts at escape and freedom, the escape, life as a free man and sometimes advocacy against the practice and economy of the Slave Trade, contemporary migrant writings present a plethora of themes, techniques and genres. In Nigerian migrant literature, especially, the thematic preoccupations, stylistic dexterity and the generic modulations are as diverse as they are engaging.

The first generation of Nigerian writings feature many writers who had to take up residence in the diaspora against their will. The crises of development, postcolonial disillusionment as well as military dictatorship forced many to seek refuge in other lands. Successive military regimes made Nigeria almost uninhabitable for the common man. There were coups, counter coups, civil war, ethnic wars and religious killings. Home then became a trap and the mouth of the shark (Shire 2011:55), forcing thousands of students, professionals and writers to flee. Wole Soyinka, for instance, left the country in the 1970s after completing a two-year jail term for airing his views on the Biafran war; Chris Abani fled having been in jail thrice; Oyin Oguibe left in 1989; Chinua Achebe left in the early 1990s; Irobi Esiaba, Tess Onwueme, Biyi Bamidele, Tanure Ojaide and Niyi Osundare also left in the 1990s. The exilic temper in Nigerian literature is especially discernible in the poetic genre; examples include Olu Oguibe’s *A Gathering Fear* (1988) and *A Song from Exile* (1990), Tanure Ojaide’s *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1998) and Odia Ofeimun’s *London Letter and Other Poems* (2000). In recent times, the thematic preoccupation with exile and the exilic – spiritual, psychological, physical and psychical – has gradually given way to thematic engagements with migration, return migration and

transnationalism. The shift from the exilic to the migrant is especially discernible in the prose genre.

In Nigerian migrant literature, Buchi Emecheta, Femi Ojo-Ade, Tess Onuweme, Biyi Bamidele and Ben Okri are renowned authors who write or have written from the diaspora for some time. There is, however, a new crop of writers, many of whom are often described as constituting the Third Generation of Nigerian writing. They reside outside Nigeria, and are pushing the frontiers of Nigerian literature at a frenzied pace, so much so that Onyerionwu (2012:1) commenting on the literary prowess of these writers asserts that:

At no other period has Nigerian literature witnessed such a robust imaginative harvest; at no other time has the world literary arena been forced to stand in herald of yet another Nigerian prize winner at such heartening frequency. At no other time had creative talent flourished unhindered in Nigeria, leaving behind a productivity that tasks pundits' sense of statistics; at no other time have we had almost as many literary scholars at international bases, spreading the gospel of our intellectual resilience ... At no other time has literary experimentation been the hallmark of an accomplished tradition. In fact, at no other time have wishes been horses!

The writers include Chimamanda Adichie, arguably the most popular of them all, Sefi Atta, Teju Cole, Chika Unigwe, Segun Afolabi, Chinundu Onuzo, E.C. Osondu, Helen Oyeyemi, Tola Okogwu, Nnedi Okorafor, Sade Adeniran, Ike Oguine, Akwaeke Emezi, Bernadine Evaristo, Yewande Omotoso, Chinelo Okparanta, amongst others. The writings of these contemporary migrant writers explore the experiences of migration – the mass fantasy around migration, the push and pull factors that foster emigration from Nigeria, racism and cultural dislocation in the host land, diasporic disillusionment, and return migration.

While it could be said that there has been a thriving critical scholarship around Nigerian migrant writers and writings, not much attention has been paid to migrant texts' preoccupation with the recreation of migrant characters' experiences of love, intimacy and connected identity politics in the diaspora, despite its ample representation in such texts as Sarah Ladipo-Manyika's *In Dependence*, Chika Unigwe's *The Phoenix*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*, E.C. Osondu's *Voice of America* Sefi Atta's *A bit of Difference*, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail* and others. Existing critical engagements with Nigerian migrant fiction largely focused on exilic themes and aesthetics, and the representations of belonging, alienation, displacement and rootlessness. Kehinde's 'Writing the Motherland from the Diaspora: Engaging Africa in Selected Prose Texts of Dambudzo Marechera and Buchi Emecheta' (2009), for instance, focused on the representations of Africa and how exile is configured in the works of Buchi Emecheta and Dambudzo Marechera. Idowu-Faith (2011), Ajibola (2018) and Feldner (2019) explored the representation of migration and return migration in the works of Chimamanda Adichie, Sefi Atta and Chika Unigwe. The studies focused on migrant characters' tendency to migrate Northward, by all means, only to become disillusioned in many cases, and thereafter seek a return, which may be physical or psychological. Ouma (2011) explored the configurations of childhood in the works of Chimamanda Adichie, Chris Abani and Helen Oyeyemi, while O'Connor (2005) examined hybridity in the works of Ben Okri. Essentially, there is a paucity of critical engagements with Nigerian migrant writers' representation of the complexities that attend the formation and reconfiguration of migrant characters' identity and love relationships outside of Africa.

For this study, the methodology involves a close reading of Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Segun Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. The three narratives were purposively selected for critical analysis in this study, which essentially employs a qualitative approach, through a close reading and analysis of the selected texts. The selection of texts is informed by the texts' thematic preoccupation with the depiction of African migrant characters' experiences at home and abroad. All three texts bear witness to African migrant

characters' struggles in their attempt to have meaningful love relationships in the diaspora. Out of a number of other narratives by African writers that recreate the experiences of migrant characters abroad, these three were selected because they present migrant characters' experiences in the homeland before leaving for the West, their motivations for leaving and their experiences in the diaspora. Additionally, they present the characters' eventual homecoming and a critique of Nigeria's grim state of affairs which has made it imperative for many of her citizens to take flight West-ward. Furthermore, the novels feature characters that are made to contest for the dignity of their persons in the diaspora. All three protagonists have to strive to sustain their personalities under the pressures of assimilation. Time and again, the characters witness racial discrimination and self-abasement; they are often homesick and alienated. In a bid to reconnect with the homeland that they had once abandoned, they journey back psychologically and/or physically, from time to time. All three protagonists return to Nigeria at the peak of psychological crises resulting from alienation, loneliness and a general dissatisfaction with the host land. Nigeria, which was once abandoned voluntarily, thus becomes a land of solution and resolution, which affords the protagonists succour for their experiences of racism, culture shock, alienation, dislocation, identity crisis, the politics of inclusion and exclusion and homesickness, in the West.

The three texts, *Americanah*, *Goodbye Lucille* and *Edible Bones*, are examined in dialogue with two concepts – Othering and unhomeliness, from the Postcolonial theory. While Othering was popularised by Gayatri Spivak, unhomeliness was popularised by Homi Bhabha. Homi Bhabha, together with Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, arguably form the tripod of Postcolonial theory, especially with regard to its contemporary design. Othering, according to Spivak, denotes a process by which the Empire created, delineated and stigmatised an 'other' – a different, degraded and necessarily inferior species. Essentially, Othering presents a complex process of 'creating the enemy, of delineating that opposition that must exist, in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007:158). Thus, the coloniser "locates its 'others' by this process in the pursuit of that power within which its own subjectivity is established" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007:158). Unhomeliness is Bhabha's appropriation of what Freud captures as 'unheimlich', by which he describes the uncanny state. Okoye (2008:79) sees 'unhomeliness' as the postcolonial condition of displacement, invasion, and estrangement of 'home' which typifies the experiences of displaced subjects as they engage with the project of identification against the drifting (dis)locations of home in two spaces: the natal homeland and the host nation. The sense of unhomeliness is 'this sense of being caught between two cultures and not entirely at home in either of them' (Dobie 2011:212). Homelessness and the unhomeliness of home constitute a traumatising reality for migrant characters in the texts being examined. For this study, these two terms, Otherness and unhomeliness, are useful in underscoring the power play encountered by African migrant characters in the diaspora.

As will be seen in the analysis of the chosen texts, the protagonists are forced to reconsider, redefine and reconfigure their identities in the host land. The reconfiguration of their identities has an untold impact on their relationships and affinities. The characters occupy in-between spaces and are faced with the reality of their difference, their othered position, as soon as they go abroad. Adichie for instance said in an interview conducted by David Graham (2014) that she only realised that she was a black when she got to the United States of America. She found herself taking on a new identity, 'or rather I found a new identity thrust on me ... I became black. I hadn't thought of myself as black ... I'm very happily black. I don't have a problem with having skin the color of chocolate'. It was later she realised that in America being black came with baggage. Likewise, Moses Isegawa (2014) when interviewed alongside Mahmood Mamdami by Michael Vasquez, expatiated that Africans become Africans for the first time when they leave Africa. Adichie and Isegawa's assertions which resonate with many Nigerian migrant characters' experiences affirm that the diasporic identity, which is one that is often formed in

transition, is always under construction. It is clear that the writers, as well as the migrant characters, face what Fanon (1967:69) captures as 'the fact of blackness' once they step out of their countries. The representations of these realities, the realities of border lives, identity negotiation and diasporic dislocations, are explored in the three texts with the aid of the postcolonial conceptions on Otherness and unhomeliness.

The Politics of Love and Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Segun Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*

Chimamanda Adichie, Segun Afolabi and Unoma Azuah are Nigerian migrant writers who have achieved certain levels of success in the West. They have attained critical acclaim within and outside Africa, Europe and America. Adichie, often adjudged to be the literary goddaughter of Chinua Achebe, has four creative texts in her oeuvre, namely *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and *Americanah* (2013). All four narratives have gained some measure of canonisation. In Unoma Azuah's case, her poems are somewhat more popular than her narratives. Azuah is part of The Griot Collective, a poetry group in West Tennessee, and her significant contribution earned her the Griot Hero Award in 2006. Azuah also co-edits the *Sentinel Annual Literature Anthology*. Her earlier publication, a collection of short stories, was titled *The Length of Light*. *Edible Bones* was published in the United States by Demarche Publishing in 2013. Segun Afolabi's debut was a collection of short stories, *A Life Elsewhere*, which was published in 2007. *A Life Elsewhere* consists of seventeen short stories that recount varied tales of the triumphs and trials experienced by immigrants from diverse places around the globe. 'Monday Morning', the story for which Afolabi won the 2005 Caine Prize for African Writing, is one of the short stories in the collection. *Goodbye Lucille* was published in 2007.

Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille*, Azuah's *Edible Bones* and Adichie's *Americanah* all present migrant characters' experiences in the homeland and in the diaspora. In all three texts, characters are engaged in what can be termed a voluntary albeit obligatory migration. It is a case of migration-for-survival, since home has ceased to be home. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu, Obinze, Emenike, Ginika's family all flee the country to escape what Obinze describes as the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness:

All understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well, fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty (Adichie 2013:192).

Postcolonial disillusionment, inexplicable poverty and the lack of a stable certain future constitute the push factors that cause characters to desire emigration by all means. In a comic episode, a character, Sister Ibinabo, a leader in Ifemelu's mother's church, starts a program titled 'The Student Visa Miracle Vigil'. At the vigil, youths from diverse places hold out an envelope 'with a visa application form, on which Sister Ibinabo laid a hand of blessing' (71). The mass fantasy around emigration from the country is vividly portrayed in the characters' acceptance of a visa grant as a miracle. Ifemelu tells of a final year student who 'miraculously' gets an American visa and joyfully abandons all to flee to America.

In Kaitochukwu's case, the protagonist in *Edible Bones*, the lure of America was nourished by the desire to also achieve the American dream, thanks to the distorted promotions on the social media, the colonial legacies of Africa's inferiority and the illusion that America is the Promised Land. Kaito resigns from his job as a security officer at the American Embassy in Lagos, where he wielded power over the thousands of visa applicants, whose plight is humorously but pitifully described in the first paragraph of the narrative:

It was not yet 4a.m. A large crowd had lined up like a trail of ants at the American Embassy in Lagos. Some of them who refused to join the queue milled around the entrance gate. Kaito eyed them. He had an urge to open fire on them. He had yelled, cursed, pushed, but each time he walked back to his security cubicle, they drifted right back to the same spot ... they pressed closer to the entrance gate. Some looked up at the height of the fence, as if they intended to scale it and run into the embassy (Azuah 2013:6).

Goodbye Lucille's Vincent is also not shielded from abysmal life, that is the reality in Nigeria. He loses both parents in a car accident on the Kaduna-Jos Road while returning from a visit to Vincent's grandmother, and has to take up residence with his uncle, Raymond who constantly moves from one nation to another. As exemplified in Kaito, Ifemelu and Vincent's realities in Nigeria, uncertainty, poverty and hopelessness often push Nigerians to seek greener pastures elsewhere.

In the diaspora, Ifemelu, Kaito and Vincent must renegotiate their identities. Ifemelu is shocked by the grim realities in Brooklyn, a place she has grown up believing was next to paradise. Kaito becomes disillusioned when he remains jobless and hopeless for so long. Vincent eventually grows to hate London and his life there. It is in the diaspora that these characters realise that they are different; they are the others, that is, they are blacks, and blacks are not especially close to the top of the ladder. Ouma (2011:286) asserts that diasporic identities are constructed as processes of becoming. Every migrant in the three texts is reconfigured by the diaspora. They are all marked by the condition of the diaspora, one that Cho (2007:11) describes as a condition of subjectivity that is marked by sorrow, loss and unhomeliness. Cho (2007) further elucidates on what it means to be 'unhomed':

To live in diaspora is to be haunted by histories that sit uncomfortably out of joint, ambivalently ahead of their time and yet behind it too. It is to feel a small tingle on the skin at the back of your neck and know that something is not quite right about where you are now, but to know also that you cannot leave. To be un-homed is a process. To be unhomely is a state of diasporic consciousness (Cho 2007:19).

The migrant characters feel out of place. They experience what Homi Bhabha (1994:18) captures as the 'unhomeliness of migrancy', and this necessitates a re-examination and reconfiguration of their identities. They are 'caught between two cultures and not entirely at home in either of them' (Dobie 2011:212).

In the texts, migrant characters' identities are subject to constant changes and reconfigurations. The migrant identity, according to Van Teeseling (2011:90), quoting Rushdie (1991), a migrant scholar and creative writer, 'is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools'. Rushdie's assertion essentially reflects the lot of the migrant writer and his or her migrant characters. The migrant is forced to embrace a 'different' culture and make attempts at reconstructing or defending his or her identity. Ouma's (2011:286) assertion which resonates in many migrant characters' experiences affirms that the diasporic identity, which is one that is often formed through dislocation and deracination, is always under construction, since mobility occasions cultural dynamism and identity tensions and struggles. The characters all struggle to reconstruct an identity that resonates with their migrant status. Their identity becomes fluid, unstable and fragmented.

In the face of a new cultural context, charged expectations and the drive to survive, Obinze in *Americanah* changes his name to Vincent in order to work using Vincent's card, in exchange for forty percent of his salary. Ifemelu takes on Ngozi Okonkwo's Social Security Card and she becomes Ngozi Okonkwo in order to get a job. Ifemelu does absurd things that she would not have dreamt of doing in Nigeria. Ginika, another character in *Americanah*, starves herself in

order to look like her American friends. Of Ginika's new identity, Ifemelu remarks that she looked like a dried stockfish and 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). Even young Dike, Auntie Uju's son, is not left out. He commits suicide because his world only accepts people whose skin colour is different from his. Auntie Uju and Bartholomew speak with a false accent that no one understands. Emenike, Obinze's cunning childhood friend, is the worst of all the desperate assimilationists. He marries an older white woman and becomes a 'yes-man' simply to please her. Obinze notes that Emenike has cast home, that is Nigeria, as 'the jungle and himself as interpreter of the jungle' (185).

In *Goodbye Lucille*, Vincent's perennial identity search is especially pathetic. He flees London to escape from himself, yet in Berlin he wastes his time moving from one club to the other. Vincent makes his abode in a shabby Kreuzberg apartment block that is owned and run by Frau Lieser. His *Asylbewerber* friends too are marked by the condition of the diaspora; their plight is often worse than his. For instance, Ari, whom the narrator calls a Kurdish *Asylbewerber*, is denied full integration. For more than a year since he arrived in Berlin, he has been waiting for a decision on his immigration status. Ari is mostly lonely, fearful, unsettled and edgy; he always has a far-away look in his eyes. The narrator notes that:

Every day he has some new worry more pressing than the previous day's. It will invariably be linked to his current state of limbo; he is not strictly a resident of any country at the moment (Afolabi 2010:32).

Ezmir, like Ari is always nervous. As postcolonial migrants, they and others like them often have a sense of loss and discomfort. They feel nostalgic about the country they left and the new host nation that neither expressly accommodates them nor sends them packing. Ari's feelings of displacement and dispossession are in consonance with those of Bangladeshi Australian, Iqbal Chaudhary, in Khan's *Seasonal Adjustment* (1994:143), a migrant text. Iqbal's words fully capture the losses that more often than not attend migration:

Do you know what it means to be a migrant? A lost soul forever adrift in search of a tarnished dream? You believe in a perpetual state of conflict, torn between what was and what should have been. There is a consciousness of a permanent loss. You get sick of wearing masks to hide your confused aloneness. You can never call anything your own.

Ari, Karwan, Mehmet, Ezmir, Ezmir's friends from Ghana and Sediq and the family from Somali, all desperately seek acceptance and a sense of belonging in Berlin, but they are denied these.

Commenting on the politics of belonging in an article entitled 'Exile and the Creative Imagination', Oguibe (2005:10) notes that gaining access to a particular world or space requires belonging. He asserts that the fact that an individual inhabits a world is not an automatic ticket to belonging to that world. He relates that 'habitation in a world does not equal belonging unless the subject is in his or her natural surroundings, for, it is one thing to inhabit a place and quite another to be in one's place'. Hence, the 'mere physical presence, or even the mental projection of belonging – the wishful assumption of belonging – does not in real terms translate into being part of a place; to be in a place is not the same as to be of that place'. Because of the lack of acceptance and a sense of belonging, the asylum seekers in *Goodbye Lucille* often become frustrated and hopeless. In a moment of desperation, Ezmir commits suicide. The death of Ezmir, Frau Schlegel and Heinrich Helzemann force Vincent to ponder on what life really means. He says that he '... didn't understand this life, the way it ran ahead of you – no beginning and no end – only a shapeless, ragged road with turnings, random as a game of chance' (219). He comes to the conclusion that life is a process of maintaining equilibrium, 'from tipping too far in either direction, from inertia to absolute chaos' (293). It is noteworthy, however, that it is not just the

asylum seekers in Berlin that are made to engage the questions of home, face dislocation and a sense of displacement that attends migration. Vincent, a legal immigrant, also deliberates on where his home is and what it has come to mean to him.

In *Edible Bones*, Kaito is marred by his experiences in the diaspora. He engages in unthinkable acts and he is constantly on the run. He eventually changes his name in order to get a false identity card. At times, he is Kaito Francis Mu Bundu, at other times, he is Francis Egu, as the occasion demands. His helper, Abuda, another pitiable migrant like himself, has also had his worst in America. Kaito is initially shocked that Abuda, despite his years in America, his education and numerous travels, had no family, no property and no accumulated wealth. To a credulous Kaito, Abuda is an '*akalogoli*, a loser who had the opportunity to live in America and transform his life and the lives of his relatives, but failed to do so' (44). Kaito buys into what Ojaide, a migrant poet, in 'Immigrant Voice' (1998:105) terms a photo trick. The poetic persona laments in pidgin that 'America na big photo-trick to me/ If say big thief no boku for home/And they give man chance to live softly/America no be place to live for one whole day'. For months after Kaito's arrival in America, he lives on the fringes on the society. He is assaulted by the women he meets – April, Beth and then Sabrina; his employers cheat him endlessly, so much so that he concludes that his enemies from his parents' families were after him. He wonders how the Atlantic Ocean was not a challenge for the witches to cross. Within two years, thanks to worries about the lack of money, belonging and agency, Kaito loses much weight and his muscles constantly ache but he cannot go to the hospital because he lacks health insurance. He slaves in America for peanuts; he works so hard, for so little, when compared to what he had as a security guard at the American Embassy in Nigeria.

Beyond the recreation of the migrant characters' identity struggles, the three narratives depict how characters' hybrid and ever-changing identities impact their love relationships. Each narrative presents the diverse types of relationships that migrant characters engage in in the Nigerian diaspora. This ranges from same-sex marriages to green marriages (sham marriages invented because of immigration papers), to polygamy to transnational relationships initiated and preserved by emails and phone calls. Kaito is the most unfortunate of all three protagonists. April is his first acquaintance in America, but she disowns him as hastily as she embraced him. Beth, his new host, turns him into a sex toy and a bait to get more money. Sabrina, who appears to be the kindest of the cruel women in his life, manipulates him at will. She gets pregnant and makes endless demands for money until Kaito is again forced to flee. Kaito's neighbour, Brian, then sets him up with his stout sister, who weighs about 400 pounds. At first, Kaito stoops low to please her until he becomes sick of living in her apartment and being ordered around like a child. He again flees Ohio. In Brownsville, Tennessee, he finds himself with Rosie, whom he agrees to marry to obtain his papers. Rosie is twice divorced with two grandchildren, but Kaito does not have a choice. He gets a loan and gets married to Rosie. It is after the marriage that Kaito realises that he has again landed in a ditch, as Rosie is a drug addict. Just before Kaito's immigration interview, Rosie disappears, leaving Kaito penniless, helpless and hopeless. In a fit of anger, Kaito attacks Purky who had helped him to 'arrange' Rosie for marriage. He is subsequently arrested. He is rearrested for being in possession of a fake green card as he attempts to flee Tennessee for California. Kaito's days in America present a gory tale of misfortunes, misery and disillusionment.

In *Edible Bones*, there is also Abuda, Kaito's uncle and helper who leaves his young wife and a son in Enugu for America after he wins a scholarship to study at Cambridge. He marries April, a white girl who suffers from bipolar disorder, after his Nigerian wife remarries since she got tired of waiting for him to earn one degree after another, and his only son joined the Nigerian army and was killed. Distressingly, April starts to attack him after she begins to skip her drugs. She spends all his money until he goes bankrupt and thereafter refuses to grant him a divorce. Abuda's story is that of a failed migrant. He talks about going home after he leaves the

rehabilitation centre, but he can hardly define where home is. Questions of home pervade most migrant narratives. The diaspora is depicted as a place of recurrent dislocation and displacement; it is captured as a site of disruption, transformation and exchange (Mehta 2009:3). The home for the migrant presents an anchor for the lost, alienated and rootless soul, but there are usually complexities around what constitutes a home for the migrant.

Ifemelu's love escapades in the diaspora appears to be the most interesting of the three protagonists. Before leaving Nigeria for Brooklyn, she dates Obinze, her secondary school classmate. Before Obinze, Ifemelu had dated Mofe, but she leaves Mofe for Obinze, and their love blossoms to the chagrin of many of their friends. They both decide to attend the University of Nsukka, in order better to look after Obinze's mother, a lecturer at the university. At the university, Ifemelu joins one protest after the other, chanting alongside other students: 'No light! No water! ... VC is a Goat!' (65). When Ifemelu, after endless strike actions and student protests, decides to seek her fortunes abroad, Obinze also tries his luck in London. Ifemelu's endless job search and Obinze's inability to find stability in London soon snuff out their love. Ifemelu's maltreatment at the hands of a tennis coach causes her to be estranged from Obinze, as well as Auntie Uju and her friends. She bears the mockery of her roommates who see her as the poor African girl who is unable to pay her rent. Ifemelu comes to hate her life in America. She does not have enough money to buy textbooks and so she borrows. When the weather becomes cold, she refuses to buy a sweater because of the cost. She tells Ginika that she 'would wear all her clothes at the same time, in layers, until she found a job' (89). She is often terrified to spend money; she only buys cheap things and still she barely has enough to feed on. This leaves her at war with everyone, Obinze, Auntie Uju, her roommates, all alike. She feels she is at war with the whole world, and she wakes up each day feeling bruised, imagining that a horde of faceless people is against her.

After Obinze, Ifemelu dates Abe, a white student in her class, who likes her well enough but does not see her as a female. She notes that 'she was invisible to Abe' (134) and so she breaks up with Abe and dates Curt, her boss Kimberly's cousin. Curt often says that theirs is a love at first laugh. He is thrilled when he hears her deep voice and sees her laugh a laughter 'so vibrant, shoulders shaking, chest heaving; it was the laugh of a woman who, when she laughed, really laughed' (134). Ifemelu is also taken with Curt, a rich and handsome American. However, their love is disabled by racial discrimination. Curt's mother does not approve of the relationship. Furthermore, the society views them as an unpardonable mismatched couple:

She had seen that look before, on the faces of white women, strangers on the street, who would see her hand clasped in Curt's and instantly cloud their faces with that look, the look of people confronting a great tribal loss. It was not merely because Curt was white; it was the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money (Adichie 2013:202).

Ifemelu realises that were it that Curt were poor, fat, older, ugly or dreadlocked, then the relationship would have been less remarkable, and the guardians of the tribe would be mollified. On Ifemelu's blog, she writes of the unmistakable racial ladder that operates in America:

There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvellous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!) (Adichie 2013:29).

When Ifemelu gets tired of the artificiality of her relationship with Curt, she cheats on him with Rob, her neighbour. She then leaves Rob for Blaine, an African American college professor at Yale. Like a master player, Ifemelu manipulates and dumps men to suit her purposes. She does not allow her diasporic subjectivity to rob her of the power to date white men and draw the curtain whenever she wants.

In *Goodbye Lucille*, Vincent's lethargic hold on life makes him cling to Lucille, his girlfriend who lives and works in London. Vincent works as an assistant curator for Mattias Trommler on Fasanenstrasse, which he describes as a poor imitation of a gallery, but he soon loses the job. The loss is a great relief to Vincent, since the job has effectively pulled him away from London to Germany, where he has succeeded in getting away from himself, 'relieved to breathe again' (2). The only reason he works is so that he can pay his rent. He neither seeks to improve his present lot nor nurses any ambitions for the future, although he had had great dreams in the past. In the past, he had wanted to be a high-profile photographer who takes pictures of stars and celebrities, but this was not to be, since he is a character that lacks 'the inclination for hard toil' (3). His lack of zeal also affects his relationship with Lucille. Thanks to his lack of dreams or hope, Lucille dumps him for a lawyer. To drown his feelings of solitude, helplessness and worthlessness, Vincent goes to the club and gets drunk, and by chance he meets Claudia. Vincent then starts to date Claudia, the daughter of Frau Schlegel, a rich alcoholic. It is in the process of looking after Claudia and her mother that Vincent begins to gradually have a hold on his own existence.

For Ari Jaziri, Vincent's neighbour, the condition of the diaspora makes it impossible for him to live with the woman he loves, Hezar, his seventeen-year-old fiancée. He had fled from Turkish soldiers in south-eastern Turkey, only to find himself alongside many others in another 'prison', with terrible living conditions and the need to always run from immigration officers. Their hostel is overcrowded and restrictive; it looks more like an office block or a warehouse than a home. The rooms are airless and overcrowded:

Inside was a kind of makeshift dormitory with five or six interspersed bunk beds. Even though the window had been flung wide open, the atmosphere inside was stifling. On the lower half of some of the beds were several African men – in sitting positions, some lying down. They were all, without exception smoking (Afolabi 2010:128).

On Vincent's return to Germany from Nigeria he learns that Ezmir Ozdemi, one of the immigrants that he photographed, has committed suicide after his interview with German immigration officers. Fulfilment eludes the migrant characters in *Goodbye Lucille*, Vincent included.

The diaspora is also depicted in the three narratives as a place that presents potential for self-discovery and self-destruction. While the three protagonists make the best of the diaspora, having made mistakes at first, some characters are subdued and destroyed in the diaspora. For instance, Ezmir in *Goodbye Lucille* is destroyed in the diaspora. He commits suicide when he is denied acceptance and support. Obinze is traumatised by his experiences in London, just as Nicholas, Obinze's cousin, a fun-loving person when he was in Nigeria, is now a ghost of his former self. Nicholas now speaks with a soberness so forbidding that it is almost comical. His wife, Ojiugo, explains that Nicholas is changed because for a long time after he moved to London he lived in fear, working under other people's names, just to make enough money to get his papers. Obinze remarks on the power of the diaspora to reconfigure and reshape the immigrant: 'he knew of the many stories of friends and relatives who, in the harsh glare of life abroad, became unreliable, even hostile versions of their former selves' (Adichie, 2013:173). The migrant characters must often embrace harsh assimilationist acts and attitudes and thus forfeit their true identities and loyalties or risk being deported.

Conclusion

In a postcolonial temper, Adichie, Afolabi and Azuah present the struggles that migrant characters face in the reconstruction of their identities and the impact on their love relationships, in order to deconstruct superlative views of the West as the land of perfection and bliss. They present characters whose existence and happiness is reduced to the possession of a valid ID card. On Obinze's arrival in London, in *Americanah*, Nicholas informs Obinze that an NI number is almost as important to his survival as the air he breathes. He admonishes Obinze to take all the jobs he could, spend nothing and even marry an EU citizen all in order to possess his papers.

The novelists reiterate the fact that the West is no Promised Land. Ifemelu, Aunty Uju, Dike, Nicholas, Illoba, Ginika, Vincent, Ari, Karwan, Mehmet, Ezmir, Sediq, Kaito, Abuda, Amin and Kamalu all suffer in the diaspora. To present cautionary tales and demystify untoward aspirations for West-ward migration are the end to which the recreation of migrant characters' love relationships is made in the texts. The texts bear witness to migrant pains and suffering, all of which affect the characters' relationships. Goyal (2014:xii) in a reading of *Americanah*, perceptively asserts that the text can be placed within 'a larger tradition of postcolonial writing – reversing the heart of darkness narrative, where rather than Europeans or Americans going to Africa to find themselves, an African character travels to the heart of the West, only to find darkness there'. Kaito who had earlier believed America to be the land of freedom finds himself in jail.

The novelists all highlight the fact that the West is not paradise. Aunty Uju, in spite of the fact that she is a medical doctor in the United States is often miserable. Whenever Ifemelu visits her, she airs her 'grievances like jewels' (Adichie 2013:128). Ifemelu realises that people often work several jobs in America, in order to make ends meet. Aunty Uju works three jobs, Ginika works and schools and so do Wambui, Mwombeki and others. In London, Obinze moves from cleaning toilets to cleaning wide passages in a detergent packing warehouse, to offloading household goods. Kaito, because he is an illegal immigrant, moves from cleaning dishes and frying chicken to working in Jemina's house. He also works as a security guard briefly, before he is thrown in jail. The protagonists all experience racial discrimination of varying levels in the diaspora. They are different from those around them and they are treated as such. They are faced with people who see them as inferior because of their skin colour. They are made to answer questions from those who hold myopic views about Africa and Africans. Kaito for instance is quizzed by Sabrina 's mother on what human meat tastes like. Ifemelu is amazed at Cristina Tomas, the lady in charge of International Students' registration, who addresses Ifemelu slowly because she believes that Ifemelu must find it hard comprehending English, leaving Ifemelu to wonder why a foreigner would assume that she does not use the English language fluently when she had spoken English all her life.

Mishra and Hodge (1991:399) relate that the postcolonial discourse presents a politics of opposition and struggle; it essentially problematises the key relationship between the centre and the periphery. True to this assertion, the novelists write to demystify migration as the ultimate solution to a desperate characters' plight, by recreating the tasking challenges that Nigerian migrants face in the diaspora. Migrant characters in the three novels are marginalised and subject to various forms of discrimination, oppression and stereotyping. It is noteworthy that Nigeria is presented in the three texts as the land of return, the home of ultimate solution. Ifemelu will only find love, life and fulfilment when she returns to Nigeria. Vincent's lackadaisical attitude and lack of motivation, which are a result of post-traumatic stress disorder, will only find a healing balm in Nigeria. Vincent's eventual 'working through' is traceable to his relationship with Claudia and his trip to Nigeria. Kaito in *Edible Bones*, just like Obinze in *Americanah*, will only find prosperity in Nigeria. Kaito realises that the friends he left behind are no more on the same level. They are wealthy and their families could even afford vacations abroad. The negative impact of the diaspora on migrant characters' love relationships is a recurrent topos in all three texts. Thus, *Goodbye Lucille*, *Edible Bones* and *Americanah* all depict cultural, social, political and racial barriers as some of the complexities that attend the construction of love relationships in the Nigerian diaspora, in order to underscore the place of the motherland in finding fulfilling love relationships, and reject myopic and distorted views and designations of the centre and the margins, the West and the rest.

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