

International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)

Bahir Dar- Ethiopia

Vol. 4(2), S/No 14, April, 2015: 107-120

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v4i2.9>

Critical Themes in Some Nigerian Diaspora Short Stories

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Abstract

The current spate of migrations of Nigerians to other parts of the world such as Europe, the United States of America and South Africa has been of concern to many. Of recent, several migrants and those who have close insight into migrant experiences have been writing of migrants lives in diverse forms of literature. These writings have provided insight into Nigerian migration issues. The article uses postcolonial theory in studying critical themes in some Nigeria diaspora short stories in order to understand issues surrounding migrant life both abroad and at home in Nigeria. The article identifies about four critical themes that are common to most diaspora short stories such as reasons that prompt migration, perception versus reality of overseas countries, sexual issues of migrants, and racism faced by migrants abroad. The article finds that experiences migrants go through brings them to a point of recognition of the harsh realities of life in foreign countries. These conditions force them to become nostalgic of home, resilient in their attitude to life, and sometimes to decide on returning home. The article suggests that migrants and governing authorities could do more to improve social conditions at home which in effect would go a long way in stemming the high tide of migration out of the country.

Key Words: bigamy, critical, diaspora, Migrants.

Introduction

Migration is a worldwide and age long phenomena. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary migration is to move from one country, place or locality to live or work in another. People migrate for a variety of reason. Such reasons could be due to socio – economic issues such as political discontent, wars, the quest for economic empowerment and so on. Environmental factors such as drought, flood, famine, volcanic eruptions and so on are no less important reasons for migration; so are spiritual and other diverse reasons. The African continent has particularly being an important arena in issues of migration. This is in relation to the origins of mankind whence it is believed that the first humans originated from Africa before spreading to other parts of the world. The slave trade also played a part in the forceful migration of blacks to the four corners of the world particularly to the Americas, Europe, the West Indies and North Africa.

In recent times migration is driven mostly by political and socio – economic reasons. Many Nigerians have moved away to other parts of the world for reasons as diverse as the quest for better education, commerce, political asylum and other socio – economic factors. Oluadoh Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (is probably the first work of diaspora and autobiography written by a Nigerian slave migrant. Since then, there has been a growth in the literature of the diaspora. According to Bill Ashcroft et al in *Postcolonial studies: The key Concepts*(1998), the word “diaspora” which comes from the Greek word that means to disperse, is the voluntary or forcible movements of peoples from their homelands into new regions (p. 68). Ashcroft et al point out that the most recent and most socially significant diaspora movements have been those of colonized peoples back to the metropolitan centres, and that the notion of a ‘diaspora identity’ has been adopted by many writers as a positive affirmation of their hybridity (p. 70).

The article is interested in bringing out critical themes in contemporary Nigerian short stories. The term “critical” is used in this case to imply that certain issues cropping out of diaspora experiences as reflected in current literature are precarious and dangerous to the dignity and respect to the humanity of Nigerians experiencing migration. Such themes are therefore important sign posts to exposing the challenges faced by persons who migrate from Nigeria to other parts of the world. The challenge is to identify what these critical subject matters are so that society could find ways of remedying critical situations faced by diaspora related issues in order to facilitate a harmonious relationship in society. The article therefore looks at issues that lead to migration in the first place as reflected in the various stories under consideration, challenges faced by migrants in the places they migrate to, such as challenges of the realities of life of where they migrate to, bigamy, racism and so on. The list is not exhaustive, but it is believed that an article such as this would stir more

scholarship on the matter in order to expose the hidden problems faced by Nigerians at home and in the diaspora in order to find possible ways to solving such problems.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in the article is postcolonial theory. The word postcolonial is a two pronged word used to describe the state of being of a society or entity that has come out from certain imperialism. Such a society or entity is neither in its original state, nor has it assumed the full identities of its erstwhile imperial power, therefore it is more or less an evolving entity. In another sense, post colonialism is also used as the term describing the theoretical framework that provides a features framework for the state of being of states, nationalities and entities deriving from the outcomes of the imperial experience. Robert young aptly captures the outlook of postcolonial theory that is applied in this article when he writes that postcolonial theory re-examines the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized to among other issues, participate in the goals of political liberation; having certain common characteristics such as “diaspora, transnational migration and internationalism (qtd. in Habib [2011, p. 272). The prong of this article deals with issues surrounding experiences of Nigerians in the diaspora, and the consequences of the reaction of individual characters to diaspora experiences.

There are some postcolonial concepts that are applied in this article. Such terms include “Centre, periphery or margin”, “otherness”, and “hybridity”. A brief explanation is offered here of these concepts particularly as applied in this article. The centre, periphery or margin concept is applicable to the migration of Nigerians to more developed countries of the world and is known as migration from the periphery or margins to the centre; where the formerly colonised countries are referred to as the periphery or the margin while the former colonial powers are the centre (Ashcroft et al 1998, pp. 36-37).

Otherness according to Ashcroft et al is the term in which the colonised subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow “other” and dependent, with the colonial subject being both a “child” of empire, and a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse (pp.170–171). Hybridity according to Elizabeth Odachi Onogwu (2007) in “Post – colonial and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*”, is literally the product of the mixture of two things” (p. 37).

Causes of Migration in Contemporary Nigeria

Many of the short stories surrounding diaspora issues portray causes that push Nigerians into desiring to leave the country. In “The Returnee” by Kenneth Ahaiwe, Uncle Jonathan Uduaja travels to study at Liverpool in Britain before Nigeria gained independence. Now he is returning after thirty – six years abroad and the people of Umuochi are in feverish preparations to welcome him back. The

preparations are being done with great expectation that Mr Jonathan was going to bring electricity and modern buildings to their village as Reuben Obabie does for Amaichi village. The community had jointly contributed to send Mr Jonathan abroad for higher studies. Showing how important the people view education thus they do not mind going to any length to put funds together to send one of their own abroad.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "Imitation", Obiora relocates his wife and children to Philadelphia in the United States of America. Incidentally, the United States of America is most often referred to as "America" by majority of Nigerians therefore it should be understood as such when used in this article and in the stories under analysis. It is implied in the story that there are not only better schools there for his children to attend, but also better housing and other utilities that serve their everyday needs. Obiora's wife Nkem describes America as "this country of curiosities and crudities, this country where you could drive at night and not fear armed robbers, where restaurants served one person enough food for three... America has grown on her snaked its roots under her skin" (p.37). This quotation implies that Nkem has become so used to the good life in America that she has come to luxuriate in the system and grow effete to the good life it offers. Nkem misses her Nigerian roots but she grimly recants the poverty that rids the majority of the people in the country which makes garri expensive, makes children to hawk in traffic hold-ups, poorly maintained roads and so on (p. 31). The description of the social conditions in Nigeria affords a reader the contrast between the ideal situation in America and the harsh realities in Nigeria. The narrative voice in "The Thing around Your Neck" also gives an insight into the prevailing poverty in Nigeria when she recalls the poor state of her family back in Lagos. The picture she paints is one in which the rickety Peugeot 504 her father drives allows the rain in on their way to school because it has a rust – eaten hole in the roof. Some of her cousins make some money by pushing cars stuck in the mud during rains because of poor roads. These poor conditions exist side by side an upper class that treat the poor with disdain as reflected in the story.

Similar to Mr Jonathan's case in "The Returnee", is Amanda's case in "Skin shock" by Sandra Chinyeaka Nwokocha who travels to England to acquire higher education. These short stories point to the search for education as a major impetus that make Nigerians desire to relocate to more developed countries. Another related impetus for migration as portrayed in the short stories is the search for a better life. Most Nigerians believe that one can live a high quality life in foreign countries than in Nigeria. Such belief has led many to embark on illegal trips across the Sahara desert, through Lampedusa crossings, stowing away in ships and planes leading to tragic consequences loss of life on the way. The reality that migrants face in foreign lands, usually belie the perception that migrants hither to hold about the foreign distinctions. The next section therefore examines the theme of the difference between perception and reality in some short stories.

Themes of Perception versus Reality of Overseas Countries

Nigerians and indeed other Africans perceive overseas countries such as those of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and so on as Eldorado's; that is, the most ideal places to live on earth. These perceptions are enhanced by what they see in Hollywood films, and of recent Nollywood and Ghollywood films where the best sides of overseas countries are shown. The situation is not helped by the "been – tos", that is, Africans who have stayed abroad for some time before returning home. They give the impression that abroad, there are better schools, abundance of good food, better housing, material benefits such as social welfare, better medical care, working utilities in terms of water, light, transportation so on in the foreign countries they have visited. There is no doubt that the material conditions and social utilities in more developed countries have reached higher levels than obtains in Nigeria. However, the real picture of life abroad is rarely portrayed. It is in recent fiction that the negative side of the picture is being portrayed.

Adichie's "On Monday of last week" for example offers a contrasting picture of what obtains in America and Nigeria regarding parenting. In the story, Kamara who gets a job as a nanny to Josh realises that American parents tend to over pamper their children. She portrays the scenario this way

she had come to understand that American parenting was a juggling of anxieties, and that it came with having too much food: a sated belly gave Americans time to worry that their child might have a rare disease that they had just read about, made them think that they had the right to protect their child from disappointment and want and failure (p. 82)

The quotation implies that whereas Americans have most material needs at their disposal, they however over pamper their children and subject themselves to unnecessary worries in contrast to Nigerian parents who are shown as having pressing materialistic needs that are not available to them to give to their children. Kamara, however, has to adjust herself to the way her employer Neil wants his child to be looked after because despite the fact that she holds a master's degree, she can only do the job of a nanny because she does not have a green card without which she can apply for a work permit.

Kamara who travels to America to meet her husband Tobeche has her dreams crashed. Tobeche her husband has changed. He has become Americanised he speaks using a false American accent that makes Kamara want to slap him, Tobeche cannot take care of Kamara because for all the six years he arrives America, he has to struggle for the green card. The years apart has put a distance between them thus, Kamara thinks "for a moment that he was somebody she did not know at all" (85).

The change of Tobechei can be ascribed to the syndrome of hybridity which M. A. R. Habib (2011) describes as “a state of ‘in betweenness’ with respect to two cultures” (p. 273). Tobechei’s state after staying six years in America has made him to become a creature of two cultures both Nigerian and American making him to act in ways that are incomprehensible to Kamara newly come from Nigeria. Writing on this nature of displaying characteristics from two cultures, Umelo Ojinmah (2009) in the essay “Okonkwo’s messianic fixation as a parody of colonial Induced Hybridization” observes that, “Homi Bhabha and other cultural critics argue for the growing ‘hybridization’ of national identities as a result of massive immigration and the rise of multiculturalism in place of received narratives of national traditions” (p. 153). The concept of hybridization thus accounts for persons in diaspora like Tobechei displaying traits that come from his original culture and the culture of the people he has come to live among in the diaspora.

Kamara also experiences a new type of sexuality as she gets attracted to Tracy, Neil’s wife. Even in this, Tracy lets her down as she shifts attention to Maren, Josh’s French teacher. This implies that the diaspora allows the hitherto hidden lesbianism and homosexual tendencies of characters that had hitherto hidden such tendencies to express themselves in the diaspora. It is the same experience that is recorded in Adichie’s story “The Shivering” where Chinedu a character in the story reveals his homosexual status and a type of religious fervour which may seem incongruous back in Nigeria. The story is however unresolved on the homosexuality issue as it focuses more on the loneliness of two diaspora Nigerians in America.

Nigerians perception about America is influenced by Hollywood films and what they watch on television screens. This is indicated in the opening section of Adichie’s story “The Things around Your Neck” where the main character opens with the thought that

You thought everybody in America had a car a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery they told you: in a month, you will have a big car soon, a big house (p.115).

However, the narrative voice in “The Things around Your Neck”, Akunna meets a different scenario from the one initially expected by her and her relations. The character is first confronted by an “uncle” whose house she has to leave because she refuses to allow him sleep with her. Her dreams of going to school never materialise as she has to look for a job to sustain herself and her family members back at home. She is forced to accept a job at Juan’s restaurant for a dollar less than the other employees. She comes to realise many things about America such as the fact that “rich Americans were thin and poor Americans were fat and that many did not have a big house and car; you still were not sure about the guns, though, because they

might have them inside their pockets” (p.119). Because of the uncondusive situation in which the character finds herself, “Something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep” (p.119). The experience of something around the character’s neck forms the title for the short story collection of Adichie’s. The “Something” probably relates to the experience of disappointment and disillusionment that faces Akunna in America. She is confronted by racial attitudes, joblessness, loneliness and disillusionment in America. These are situations she never expected to come her way when she and her family were looking forward to while she was in Nigeria waiting to emigrate.

The thing that chokes Akunna begins to ease a little when she finds a white lover who eases her financial and emotional situation. The story ends on an indeterminate note with Akunna having to go back home following the letter she receives informing her of her father’s death. As she lets go of her lover at the airport, a reader is left wondering if Akunna would ever think of going back to America having come face to face with the realities of America. The stories analysed so far show how far reality is from the perceptions Nigerians hold about overseas countries. This is particularly cogent in respect to America which appears to be the main destination of most émigré’s from Nigerians in the stories reflected so far. The next section looks at the themes of sexual promiscuity and bigamy which also appear to be critical themes that keep appearing in Nigerian diaspora stories.

Theme of Sexual Promiscuity and Bigamy in Nigerian Diaspora Short Stories

The Merriam – Webster online dictionary defines sexual promiscuity as the state of having many sexual partners including or involving too many people while bigamy is the crime of marrying one person while an individual is still legally married to another. The theme of sexual promiscuity and bigamy is prevalent in several Nigerian diaspora short stories. These themes can be found for example in Adichie’s “Imitation”, “On Monday of last week”, “Jumping Monkey Hill”, “The Thing around Your Neck” and “The Arrangers of Marriage”. “Waiting for ken” by Tony Enyinta and “Abroad Husband” by Chibueze Prince Orie are also two short diaspora stories that are woven around the theme of bigamy.

Most of Adichie’s characters are portrayed as promiscuous characters; a characteristic that is prevalent in the liberal sexual life style of contemporary society. This can be seen for example in the characters of Nkem and Obiora in the story “Imitation”. Before Nkem got married to Obiora she dated many married men in Lagos where she stayed. To indicate how common such practice is, the comment is made that “what single girl Lagos hadn’t?” (p.31). It is implied that the practice of sexual promiscuity between young girls and married men is for economic reasons as most of the married men dating Nkem take care of her financial issues such as paying her father’s bills after a hernia surgery; fixing the roof of her parent’s home and

furnishings; paying for her siblings school fees, and for a good apartment in a highbrow part of Ikeja (p. 31). After getting married to Obiora, Nkem gets a phone call from her friend Ijemamaka, who tells her that, her husband's girlfriend has moved into her home in Lagos. The news devastates Nkem emotionally and forms the basis for providing insight into her background, her relationship with Obiora and how it leads to her taking the critical decision to move back to Lagos in order to stay permanently with her husband. She sees her life apart from her husband as an imitation comparable to the imitation African art that Obiora has formed the habit of purchasing as gifts for her.

The character Ken of "Waiting for Ken" by Tony Enyinta also keeps a foreign wife with four kids in America to the consternation of his wife Blessing. Ken like the other diaspora male characters in most of the short stories under scrutiny keeps a foreign wife in America with children. Most times they marry the American women as a way of getting the green card which allows them to maintain a permanent residency in America and work permits as in the case of Mike of "Abroad Husband". The parents of such men that commit bigamy are usually fully aware of their children's status but see nothing wrong in keeping it away from the Nigerian based wives. The parents see the wives as being there to look after them in their old age as in the case of Blessing of "Waiting for Ken". The child she gives birth to, is for them the only grandchild they are sure that "no one, not even an American wife can take it away from us" (103). For Chinonye of "Abroad Husband", and Blessing of "Waiting for Ken", the revelation of their husbands' deceit is devastating. They are bewildered by what they get to learn about their so called "dear" husbands and the stories end on an unresolved note with the women in a state of shock. Ebuenyi Ikenna's "Passport to America" however has a twist to the tale. In the story, it is Amaka the anti – heroine who uses John to make her way to America. There she reveals her true intentions, she turns hostile to John, frames him up as brutally assaulting her, links up with her lover and gets John ejected from his house. Subsequently, she takes full ownership of the house with her secret lover. It is an ironic twist to the norm.

Theme of Racism Faced by Migrants

Ashcroft et al (1998) define racism as "a way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, casual way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, which on this basis distinguishes between 'superior' and 'inferior' racial groups" (p.199). Ashcroft et al (1998) no doubt make a valid point when they observe that the need to establish a distinction between superior and inferior came with the rise of imperialism and the growth of orientalism in the nineteenth century and "finds its most scientific confirmation in the dubious analysis and taxonomy of racial characteristics" (p.199).

In Adichie's "On Monday of Last Week", Neil who employs Kamara to baby sit his son Josh displays attitudes of racism despite the fact that his family is of mixed race. Such attitude is indeed ironical. Josh despises the word half-caste, and he treats Kamara who helps him look after his son as a mere nanny despite her high academic qualifications which are of the level of a master's degree. Adichie's "Jumping Monkey Hill" portrays a situation where Ujunwa Ogundu, the main character in the story is confronted with subtle and patronising racism from Edward and his wife Isabel the organisers of the workshop she attends in the outskirts of Cape Town. Isabel holds onto false ideas about Africans. She says Ujunwa must come from Nigeria royal stock because of her "exquisite bone structure", and good "looks" (p. 99). This implies that Isabel regards most Africans as ugly and barbaric. That is why she sees the hunting of apes as poaching them for their private parts for charms rather than for bush meat (pp. 99-100). Edward ogle Ujunwa by always looking at her chest. Her writer colleagues agree that Edward's eyes were always leering when he looked at Ujunwa and that "Edward would never look at a white woman like that because what he felt for Ujunwa was a fancy without respect" (p. 109). Edward equally dismisses the realistic stories that participants write in the course of the workshop. This implies that the ideas Edward and Isabel hold regarding contemporary African societies are false and exotic rather than real. Edward at a point makes the remark that "homosexual stories of this sort weren't reflective of Africa reality" (108); which makes Ujunwa to blurt out "which Africa?" (p.108); this shows that Edward a representative white figure does not really know what truly Africa is. The stories Edward relishes about Africa are those of killing and violence, the type the Tanzanian writer writes about concerning the killings in the Congo, which is "from the point of view of a militiaman... full of prurient violence" (109). Such a story according to Edward "was urgent and relevant... it brought news" (109). Adichie in "Jumping Monkey Hill" attempts to bring out the gulf of understanding that exists between, Africans and whites. The white guests at "Jumping Monkey Hill" look at the African guests with suspicion; Edward does not accept the true stories of Africa. It is noticeable how the guests of different colours keep to people of their own race. Racism as displayed in these stories show that the white people in these stories regard the Africans as the "Other". Another implication of these stories is that people of different races have a long way to go in achieving true understanding and appreciation of one another. There is a lack of social integration between the races.

Adichie's "The Thing around Your Neck" also contains themes of racism. Akunna comes across Americans who believe that migrants like her cannot speak English, that there are no cars in Africa, that the hair of Africans are exotic and strange, that Africans eat all kinds of wild animals. Such beliefs by Americans smack of a certain condescending, "a mixture of ignorance and arrogance" (p.116), and in addition a racist outlook. It indicates that Americans live in a closed world and do not

appreciate that people in other parts of the world; particularly Africans are human beings like every other race in the world.

When Akunna leaves the “uncles” house because she refuses to sleep with him as he demands, she ends up in Connecticut where she experiences yet different aspects what of life in America is. She is confronted with social values different from what obtains in the country she had left. She is forced to live a frugal life such as having to accept lower wages working as a waitress where Juan another Immigrant is the manager. She cannot afford to go to school. She lives in a tiny room with a stained carpet and lumpy mattress. She tends to get lonely and nostalgic of home. She sends half of her earnings to her parents every month. Her experiences point to the state of socio – economic vulnerability of migrants in foreign countries. A reader could read many meanings into the phrase “something around your neck” as implying the many nauseating and illuminating experiences of the migrants and the suffocating psychological state into which migrants are pushed.

The situation of Akunna improves somewhat when she meets a lover a white man who eases her loneliness and economic situation. Akunna however discovers that racial relationships between somebody African like her and a white man are regarded as abnormal,

You know by people’s reactions that you two were abnormal the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. The old white men who shook their heads at you, the black women whose pitying eyes bemoaned your lack of self-esteem, your self – loathing... (p.125)

The above situation indicates racial attitudes still pervasive among both the black and white people of America. Akunna’s ability to let go of her lover when she is at the airport to travel back to Nigeria on hearing of her father’s death shows that she has been able to come to a resolution of what life for a migrant in America entails - unpleasant.

“The American Embassy” in Adichie’s “The Thing Around your Neck”, shows how foreign embassies in Nigeria maltreat would be Nigerian migrants. Applicants for American visas have to wake up very early to get to the American embassy before dawn; they struggle to be on the long visa lines at the same time being whipped by soldiers who harass applicants struggling to get in the queue. They are kept in the hot sun without a shade. They pay huge sums of money as applicant fees. Through the applicant’s eyes, readers can see soldiers maltreating Nigerians anxious to get a foreign visa.

She turned to look across the street, moving her neck slowly... A soldier was flogging a bespectacled man with a long whip that curled

in the air before it landed on the man's face, or his neck, she wasn't sure because the man's hands were raised... she saw the heel of the soldier's boot squash the black frames, the tinted lenses (p.129)

The scenario painted above is not only gruesome but also situates the story in the military era of General Abacha's dictatorship in Nigeria as reflected in the story.

The character in the story who remains unnamed throughout is a victim of the harsh military regime. She has had to smuggle her journalist activist husband in the boot of their Toyota to the home of a friend, who smuggles him out of the country. Her four years old son Ugonna is brutally murdered when soldiers are sent to their house to arrest her husband because of an article he had written in a newspaper "The New Nigeria". One of the soldiers' gun goes off and hits Ugonna in the chest killing him. She had to jump from the balcony of their two storey building house leading to injury and sharp pains in her head and back.

The character is traumatised and psychologically affected. She has hallucinations and keeps seeing the blood on Ugonna's chest as a splash of palm oil, and she is placed on drugs. She seeks for asylum because of the threats to her life she receives from the soldiers not because she actually wants to leave the country. It is her experience at the American embassy that provides an insight into what Nigerians go through to obtain American visa.

Nigerians have to go through different types of antics to convince the embassy staff to grant them visas: the character for example is advised to look the interviewer straight in the face as she answers questions. She is advised to cry when telling the embassy about Ugonna. It is only rich Nigerians and persons from European countries that are issued American visa. Some applicants go to the extent of attending a special church service called the "American Visa Miracle Ministry" (133). Such practices elicit some sense of humour as it sounds outlandish in the modern period in which the story is set.

The character in "The American Embassy" is lucky to be among the first fifty allowed in for the visa interview for the day. The rest are turned away to repeat the process all over. The visa process depicted in the story conveys a sense of the harsh conditions Nigerians desiring to emigrate go through at the hands of the American embassy. When it is the character's turn to be interviewed, the process again turns out to be an impersonal exercise such that the character refuses to get emotional in order to obtain the visa. She decides that she would not hawk her son's gruesome death and memories for a visa "to safety" (p.139). She decides that what she wants is to remain in the country where she would be nearer to Ugonna's final resting place and nurture her memories of him. She turns her back on the impersonal visa interviewer and walks out of the American Embassy.

The story “Skin Shock” by Sandra Chinyeaka Nwokocha is another sublime narrative built around the theme of racism. In the story, Amanda travels to England with high expectations on a scholarship from her state government to read women’s studies. On her first day in class Amanda is taken aback by the cold treatment she receives from the class teacher Ruth Murray and her other course mates. Ruth Murray talks to her with disdainful subtlety while her course mates shun and ignore her. It is to Amanda’s credit that she recognises with immediate alacrity that what she faces is racism. The scenario is painted thus:

She eagerly waited for the girls to respond to her contribution but they never did... their faces looked resolute, as they determined to ignore her... she suspected that their action had something to do with her race... her skin colour... she scarcely knew them, yet she could see in their eyes strong hatred for her, even when she had done no wrong... (pp.124 – 125)

The passage shows how irrational racism is. It has no logical basis. One can see Amanda’s course mates and teacher hating her at sight; not for who she is, but because of her black colour and race. Even when she displays her intelligence in their discussions, they ignore her and keep as far away from her as possible. The story “Skin Shock” brings out the terrible irrationality of one human hating another on the basis of skin colour. It defies reason and paints the ugly reality of what racism entails. It detracts from human dignity and respect for a fellow human being. Amanda demonstrates great courage and determination when as the story ends; she resolves to put up a strong fight and refuse to be subjected to mental slavery because of her colour. The story ends on a positive and defiant note against racism as Amanda declares to Ruth Murray that “y-e-a-h--- very much ok. I’m black and prond” (p.126).

Conclusion

The article has identified certain themes which are critical to the progress of society in the ten short diaspora stories studied. The themes include causes of migration, perception versus reality of overseas countries, sexual promiscuity and bigamy in diaspora families; and racism faced by migrants. The article surmises that the short stories have revealed certain truths about Nigerian migration and about Nigerians in the diaspora.

The fact that persons of the formerly colonised countries are moving to the centre is a demonstration of their desire to benefit from the better life that is felt to exist at the centre. It demonstrates the courage and resilience of the formerly colonised people to search for better living. However, it is a challenge that their association with the imperial powers has not yielded the much needed change in their home countries when compared with the fortunes of former colonies in Asia who

have borrowed from western technological knowledge to the extent of overtaking western imperial powers in many sectors of enhanced living for their societies. Diaspora literature needs to get a wider readership in order to hasten a push for relevant authorities to work towards the provision of the basic amenities of life. This will ensure that people do not run away from Nigeria because of the non – existence or inadequate provision of the basic amenities of life as the stories have demonstrated.

Furthermore, with the reality of deadly sexual transmitted diseases not extant, the stories highlight the inherent menace of sexual promiscuity and bigamy to sensitise readers against sexual laxity thus enhancing the moral responsibility in humanity.

Most of Adichie’s protagonists such as Nkem in “Imitation”, Ujunwa in “Jumping Monkey Hill” and others in the diaspora stories featuring in *The Thing Around your Neck*; or Amanda in “Skin Shock” by Nwokocha and Amaka in Ikenna’s *Passport to America* are portrayed as strong, courageous and resilient characters who stand firm in the face of the odds against them in the foreign societies in which they find themselves. Their journey from the margin to the centre brings them to a point of recognition of the truth of overseas countries. Instead of allowing the hard situations they find themselves in to destroy them, they rise above such situations thus, attesting to the resilience of the human spirit. It is to be hoped that more diaspora short stories will continue to be written to facilitate the revelation of the hidden issues in migration and diaspora life. This is highly needful as migration is a constant feature of human life.

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