DISILLUSIONMENT AND SURVIVAL IN AFRICAN MIGRATION LITERATURE: A STUDY OF OKEY NDIBE'S *FOREIGN GODS, INC.* AND UNOMA AZUAH'S *EDIBLE BONES*.

BY

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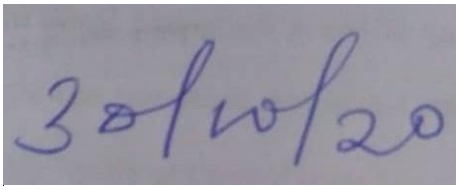
DECLARATION

With the exception of the references used in this work which have been duly acknowledged, I hereby declare that the views that have been expressed here are the product of my own study and no part or the whole of this work has been submitted to any institution for the award of any degree.



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CERTIFICATION

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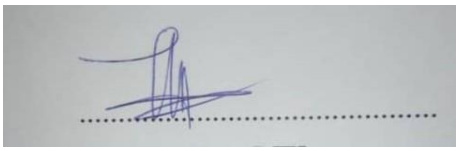

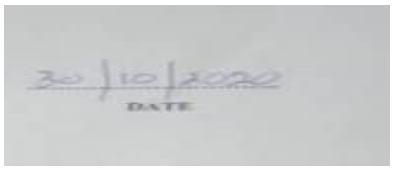

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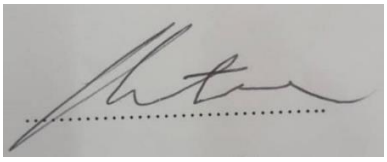

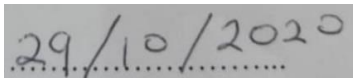

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear wife, Mrs. Grace Brobbey, who kept her queries coming; “so which chapter are you now?” “Have you contacted your supervisors?” I could not have finished this work without your encouragement and sacrifice.

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of human migration, as Marie McAuliffe and Marfin Ruhs (2017) agrees, "stretches back to the earliest periods of human history" (1). Human migration in the modern world has been massively enhanced by the ease of mobility due to the massive advancements in transport technology. People tend to migrate from one part of the globe to another where they hope to achieve better socio-economic life, or where they can be free from persecution and conscription. The compelling phenomenon of migration have found expression in African literature of the past and the present. This thesis analyses the experiences of African migrant characters in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. The disillusionment of the migrant characters as well as their strategies of survival forms the main stay of the study. Drawing on the conceptual framework of the new African diaspora, this study focuses on the diasporic experiences of what Ali Mazrui (2001) calls "the diaspora of colonialism", Africans who voluntarily migrate to the United States of America. The study shows that creative writers do provide important insights into the conditions of African migrants in the West. From the analysis in this study, one realizes that the issues of unemployment, racism and the difficulty of acquiring legal documents to live and work in the United States stand out as part of the major causes of disillusionment among African immigrants. Both writers present return migration as a better option than chasing after an American dream of success which, like a mirage, is endlessly shifting

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The phenomenon of human migration, as Marie McAuliffe and Marfin Ruhs (2017) agree, "stretches back to the earliest periods of human history" (1). Life in the modern world is characterized by rapid mobility due to the massive advancements in transport technology. People tend to migrate from one part of the globe to another where they hope to achieve better socio-economic life, or where they can be free from persecution and conscription. According to the *World Migration Report* (2018), 3.3% of the world's population were migrants in 2015. As stated in the report, the two hundred and forty four (244) million migrants around the world are mostly found in Europe, North America and Asia. Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (1993) posit that it "seems fitting to predict that the closing years of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first will be an age of age of migration" (3).

This, indeed, is evident in the prominence the subject of migration receives in world affairs; news, politics, the economy and literature. The mass movement of people from Syria and Africa towards Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, and the movement of people from South American nations towards prosperous North American nations such as the United States of America and Canada has led to politically-charged debates about the building of walls to keep irregular migrants out of the United States and Europe. On the African scene, the issue of migration is a present and prominent matter. This is because, African people; mostly young ones from Sub-Saharan Africa, are on their way out of the continent. While some persist at their attempt to travel through the regular routes, others seek to go to Europe and sometimes Israel by going across the Mediterranean Sea and the

Sinai Peninsula, respectively. Most of these African migrants embark on their journey with the hope of fleeing conscription and economic hardships. In October, 2013, the world was shocked by the death of three hundred and sixty-six (366) African migrants close to the Italian Island of Lampedusa. Only a few African migrants survived this tragedy.

Speaking to the BBC on 5th May, 2019, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Cardinal John Onayeikan expressed his utter disgust about the migration situation in Nigeria. According to him, Nigeria has virtually become "uninhabitable" by young people. He points to the extreme levels of poverty and unemployment as the main factors that are driving the youth to go all lengths to migrate through whatever means possible. He expresses his absolute embarrassment when he tells the BBC reporter, "To tell you bluntly I'm ashamed, I'm ashamed – big cardinal from Abuja, I'm moving through the streets of Rome, Milan, Naples and I see my daughters on the street on sale". Selling their bodies to any man who has the money is what some female African migrants find themselves doing in Italy. One could describe Cardinal Onayeikan as an African leader who is awakened to the pressing problem of irregular migration to the West. His advocacy for the improvement of living conditions for young people in Nigeria shows that he is very well aware of the contexts of young people's mass departure from the African continent, that is, misrule and socio-economic hardships.

In November, 2017, an exclusive CNN investigative effort revealed the auctioning of African migrants in Libya causing shock and anger across the world. Former US President, Barack Obama, French President, Emmanuel Macron amongst other world leaders spoke against this modern-day slave trade, with the then African Union Chairman, Alpha Conde calling it a "despicable trade of migrants" and a "practice of another age". Large crowds of Africans protested in front of the Libyan Embassy in Paris because all the migrants who were sold in Libya were Africans from

Sub-Saharan countries. They were sold into slavery because they could not find money to pay their captors for their freedom. They were therefore sold to the highest-bidding Libyans who used them as slaves. The selling of these migrants in Libya into slavery is another phase of the disillusionment of African migrants on their way to Europe aside the perilous journey across the Sahara and the Mediterranean. Even though several efforts have been made to repatriate African migrants in Libya to their countries of origin, many more continue to go. This is because of the bleak situation they encounter back home on a daily basis.

The compelling issue of migration has for a long time found expression in African literature. African literary writings have shown ample interest both in the voluntary migration of Africans to the West and the forced migrations through the transatlantic slave trade. After the end of the slave trade in the late nineteenth century, voluntary migration of Africans began mainly for the purposes of education. Casely-Hayford's, *Ethiopia Unbound* (1912), Kobina Sekyi's *The Anglo-Fante* (1918), Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) touch on voluntary African travels to the West. In *Ethiopia Unbound*, Kwamankra travels to Europe to acquire education with the hope of building a nation of people who have total trust in their cultural dignity and self-worth. In *No Longer at Ease*, *Second Class Citizen* and *Our Sister Killjoy*, some migrant characters seek for education in different fields in other to build their lives and return to build their various countries. Each of the migrants experience different forms of success and disappointments. For instance, while in *No Longer at Ease*, Obi Okonkwo enjoys a successful education and returns to join the civil service of the new country, in *Second Class Citizen*, Francis, Pa Noble and Babalola fail in their various fields of academic pursuits and therefore find it hard to return to Nigeria.

While some African novelists write about their experiences as migrants outside their home countries, others produce a fictional presentation of the phenomenon of migration by creating characters who migrate mostly to Europe and North America. Migration literature has its roots in the "guest worker literature" of Germany in the 1970s. According to Mirjam Gebauer and Pia Schwarz Lausten (2010), the term "migrant" or "immigrant literature" was introduced in Europe to distinguish the writings of immigrants from "émigré literature" which was used to describe the works of writers like Vladimir Nabokov and Czeslaw Milosz. Today, the term "migration literature" is a more widely accepted term (4). For Gebauer and Lausten (2010), a literary work can be described as "migration literature" "based on textual criteria such as themes and linguistic phenomena rather than the author's biography and may include emigrants as well as immigrants" (4). According to Gebauer and Lausten (2010), "…migration literature presents far too many examples of tragic destinies, among which stories of illegal immigrants underline their harsh social, economic and constitutional conditions of life" (5).

In the works of writers who Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton (2005) categorize as "first and second generation of African writers", there is a presentation of the disillusionment of Africans who migrate to the West to acquire education in order to help in the building of the post-independence African nation-states. Such characters are portrayed as people who see migration to the West as a temporary endeavour which ultimately leads to a return to Africa. Such African migrants sought to fill up vacant positions in the civil and other essential services of their new nation-states. The disillusionment of these African migrants largely bordered on the lack of social support systems for the migrants and their children and also the prevailing racial discrimination against them which made it difficult for them to get decent housing and jobs. Discriminated against, the African migrants were forced to go deep into themselves to discover the strength to

survive the period of their education and eventually return home, poised to help in the building of their various nation-states.

The works of writers who Adesanmi and Dunton (2005) describe "third generation" Africans writers, such as, Lela Abouleila's *Minaret*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* and Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* focus on different experiences of African migrants who are faced with varied circumstances in the host country. For instance, while Najwa, the protagonist of Abouleila's *Minaret* migrates to Scotland in an attempt to escape brutalization and persecution, in Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu, Aunt Uju and Obinze move to America for educational and socio-economic reasons. The selected texts for this study have been chosen as specimen to analyse the diasporic experiences of Africans in the West. It looks into the varying disillusionments of African migrants and the strength and determination for survival that these characters exhibit.

In the selected texts for this study; Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*, migration to the West is done largely for economic purposes. Acquiring an education then becomes a kind of detour to arrive at the goal; attaining economic and financial successes. Nonetheless, the pre-migration view of economic and material attainments by characters in the selected texts falls metamorphoses into a mirage. The persistent chasing after this mirage puts the African migrant characters through uncomfortable situations which call for rigorous and determined strategies of survival. Overwhelmed by their disillusioned states, African migrants usually resort to return migration. The fictional presentation of the African migrants in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* reflect pertinent issues in the migration of Africans to the West.

1.1.2 CONCEPTUALIZING THE "NEW" AFRICAN DIASPORA.

The African diaspora is a term originally used in reference to African people who moved to different parts of the world through the cruel compulsion of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term encapsulates all dispersed people across the world who are of African descent. "Diaspora", etymologically coming from the two Greek words; "dia" which translates into "across" and "sperien" which means to "to sow or disperse seeds" is a term which is originally used in connection with the Jewish dispersion across the world. George Shepperson (1982) is emphatic when he observes that "the only people who really have the right to use the word diaspora without a qualifying adjective are the Jews" (51). However, as Shepperson further agrees, the word lends itself to be used "metaphorically" leading to expressions such as the African diaspora, Chinese diaspora, Indian diaspora amongst others.

Even though the essence of the concept of African diaspora is ancient, the direct use of the term became popular in the mid-twentieth century. The concept of the African diaspora features strongly in the writings of Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois and George Padmore. The *First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists* organized by *Presence Africaine* in Paris in 1956 and the *International Congress of African Historians* held in Dar es Salaam in 1965 helped to popularize the use of the term.

It is worthy of note that the very concept of the African diaspora emerged as a response to the various attempts by white scholars to discredit the contribution of Africans to world civilization and to dehumanize the African and his culture as savage and garbage. The crass bigotry and ignorance of some white scholars and exploiters about the Africans and their culture is seen in Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent*, published in 1878, and also in the bigoted writings of Richard Burton, Hugh Trevor-Roper, G. W. F. Hegel amongst others. The literature of

the African diaspora sought and continues to seek to tell the stories of the lives of the Africans scattered all over the world; the pain of their subjugation, the unflinching resilience they show in their adversity and the beauty of their history and culture.

The African diaspora has been variously classified into; "historical and continental diaspora" (Ambassador Erieka Bennett, African Diaspora Ambassador to Ghana, 2020), "old" and "new African diaspora" (Okwepho (2001), Cajetan Iheka and Jack Taylor (2018)), and "diaspora of enslavement" and "diaspora of colonialism" (Mazrui 2001). Even though the two classifications of the African diaspora have migration in common, the old diaspora moved across the Atlantic forcibly while the new embarked, and continues to do so, voluntarily. Moved by the need to acquire education, get a job or safety, Africans on the continent began to voluntarily migrate from Africa to other parts of the world, especially America and other metropolitan centres of colonialism. Louis Chude-Sokei (2014) calls the group of continental Africans who willingly emigrated and lived in America "the newly black Americans." After the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 began to open the United States up to non-white immigrants. This led to what Chude-Sokei refers to as, "not only a redefinition of 'white' America, but also of 'black' America" (59). In other words, the Hart-Cellar Act, 1965, paved the way for a new group of black America to be formed. Up until this day, many Africans look to North America as a viable place for education, economic empowerment, asylum etc. This new group of Africans encounter the United States of America quite differently due to their difference of background from the historical African Americans. For instance, these African migrants in the diaspora have families back in Africa who depend on them for remittances which helps to sustain them. Again, events in Africa, political or economic are keenly followed by these Africans because they impact their lives in one way or the other. A good example is what Khalid Khoser (2003) notes in New African Diasporas:

An Introduction" concerning Ghanaian immigrants to Canada. According to Khoser, "Ghanaians in Toronto closely monitor the price of cement in Ghana, in order to build houses at home as cheaply as possible" (1).

John A. Arthur (2012) identifies "three waves of African migration to North America" (2). The first wave happened between the1950s and 1970s. This first wave of African migrants were made of students "who were sponsored by their respective countries to pursue advanced degrees in the arts and sciences." (2) Many of these Africans had further studies in Law, Accounting, Medicine and several other fields of academic discipline in order to build a force of enlightened individuals ready to take up the reins of power and governance once the European colonial authorities leave. This was the result of the newly independent countries' desire for a good take-off. The need to cut the reliance on universities in the colonial centres, for the training of their own professionals, for instance, made it imperative for indigenous people to be prepared to take up the task of nation-building.

The second wave of African migrations to North America, Arthur observes, began in the mid-1970s "as country after country in the region were roiled in political and economic conflicts" (3). This stage signals the despondency surrounding the independence project. The new nation-states of Africa began to be hit by military coups and counter-coups motivated by the supposed desire to fight the prevalence of corruption in the governance of the country. The greed and parochial interests of such coup and counter-coup leaders became evident a few years into their tenure of office when they get swallowed up by corruption and mismanagement. The frequent deposition of the constitution and the arbitrariness of military rule also saw the postcolonial exodus of many Africans to North America. Many Africans in this wave of migration went to Canada and the United States of America as asylum seekers because they felt unsafe in their countries of origin.

Moreover, civil conflicts that occurred during this period in Africa pushed many people from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia amongst others to seek for refuge in Canada and the United States of America.

The third and last wave of African migration to North America, John Arthur opines, "is unfolding" (4). He notes that this wave of African migration started "shortly after the beginning of this millennium" (4), that is, the twenty-first century, and involves skilled and unskilled people seeking to live and work in Canada, the United States of America, Europe and other parts of the world. For Arthur, "escape from economic destitution in Africa is the driving force behind this mass migration which, at its current epoch, compares favourably with the transcontinental migration of Europeans to North America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (4). The economic destitution of these Africans, mostly from sub-Saharan countries pushes many young Africans to make the journey through the devouring jaws of the desert to get to North African countries such as Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria before embarking on the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. Arthur makes an important point that African migrants do not just seek to reach Europe. For him, "also in sights is the United States once some of the Africans are able to reach Europe." (4)

1.1.3 SYNOPSES OF SELECTED TEXTS

***Foreign Gods, Inc.* – Okey Ndibe**

Foreign Gods, Inc. tells the story of Ikechukwu Uzondu (regularly called Ike), a Nigerian who migrates to the United States of America to acquire higher education in Economics with the hope of getting a high-paying job which befits his degree. After graduating top of his class, he is unable to secure a job because his strong African accent stands in the way. When Ike realizes that he is unable get a job that corresponds with his degree, he settles for taxi driving as a business until his

friend, Jonathan Falla, tells him about, Foreign Gods Inc., a gallery that deals in the buying and selling of the statues of ancient gods. He sees the selling of the carvings of gods as an opportunity to realize his American dreams after battling a troubled marriage and a gambling lifestyle.

With a meagre loan from friends, Ike travels back to his home village with the hope of stealing the revered statue of the riverine family god, Ngene, with the hope of selling it at a very high price to Foreign Gods Inc. in New York. He succeeds in his heist, but as it turns out, Foreign Gods Inc. is not willing to pay him the high amount he had imagined before making the journey. The offer they make him is not able to defray up to half of his travel costs to Africa. Left in a quandary, Ike takes the offer of one thousand five hundred dollars from Foreign Gods, Inc. Even though they top-up their payment with an additional thousand dollars, it is not enough to placate Ike. After the sale of Ngene to a curator, Ike returns to Foregn Gods Inc. and demands to retrieve the ancient statue back. In the end his hallucinations about the continual presence of Ngene in his room appears to be a mystical consequence of his stealing, sale and desecration of the ancient family god.

***Edible Bones* – Unoma Azuah**

In *Edible Bones* Unoma Azuah presents the challenging condition of African migrants who chase after their own version of the American dream. It tells the story of Kaitochukwu (Kaito, for short), a Nigerian graduate who works as a security man at the American embassy in Lagos. Even though working as a security man at the American embassy is a relatively stable job, he relishes life in what some of his friends refer to as "God's own country", that is, the United States of America. When he receives his three-month U.S. visa on the pretext of visiting a sick relative there, Kaito counts himself lucky because thousands of Nigerians who apply for visas at the embassy are rejected.

Upon arrival in America, Kaito is hosted by Kamalu, a Nigerian student who hails from the same village as he. It is Kamalu who bursts Kaito's imagination of a cosy ride to wealth in America. He draws Kaito's attention to the fact that his visitor's visa does not permit him to work in the U.S. Eventually, when his visa expires, Kaito takes up double jobs with employers who agree to pay him off the record. He pays to acquire residency papers which turn out to be fake and dubious. Following the advice of Abuda, Kaito moves to Brownsville where he works as an assistant tax return officer at Mr Main's tax firm. Terrified of deportation, Kaito enters a contract marriage with Rosie, a woman she gets to know through Purky Perry. Unfortunately, this attempt to outwit the system also hits the rocks as Rosie fails to turn up for the final immigration interview to facilitate his change of immigration status on the basis of marriage. Kaito's disappointment with the absence of Rosie strains his relationship with Purky.

After a fight with Purky, Kaito moves from Brownsville to California still hopeful of achieving his American dreams. It is on his way to California that Kaito gets arrested and sent to prison. When Jemina visits Kaito in prison, she agrees to marry him. This leads to a change of his immigration status and consequently, freedom. Together with Jemina, Kaito returns to Nigeria where he finds that things have change drastically. The friends he left behind have done so much good for themselves financially. After a strange encounter with a mad man in Lagos, Kaito decides to permanently stay in Nigeria in spite of Jemina's revelation of the fact that she is carrying his child.

1.1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The subject of migration keeps gaining much attention as one of the defining issues of the twenty-first century. The stories that returnee African migrants variously called; "Burgers" in Ghana, "Americanah" in Nigeria and "Bushfallers" in Cameroun give a completely polished account of

life in the West. Their affectations easily catch on with other Africans who believe with their very hearts that life in the West must be close to that in heaven, if not that of heaven itself. These accounts partly lead to the mass exodus of young people out of the continent; some making the harrowing journey across the Mediterranean Sea. The quest to establish the discrepancies between life out there in the West and the one in the African migrant's country of origin therefore becomes necessary to show that not all migrations to the West lead to material wealth. This study analyzes two narratives of failed migrations to shed much light on the error of the equalization of migration to the West with automatic economic success.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why do African migrant characters travel to the west and refuse to return to their countries of origin?
2. Do regular and irregular African migrant characters face similar experiences of disillusionment?
3. What strategies of survival do African migrant characters adopt in the selected novels?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the various factors which draw the migrant characters in both novels to the host country.
- To study the state of socio-cultural and economic disillusionment of the regular and irregular migrant characters in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*.

- To analyse the various strategies of survival that are adopted by African migrant characters in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study relies heavily on the concept of the "new" African diaspora to guide the discussion of the experiences of migrant characters in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. As Shepperson (1982) notes, the term African diaspora began in the mid-twentieth century just when the independent movement in Africa was at its apogee. However, the concept of diaspora has survived several millennia beginning with the Greeks. William Safran (1991), James Clifford (1994), Isidore Okpewho (2001) and Robin Cohen (2008) agree that the term gained prominence in usage in connection with the dispersal experiences of the Jewish people. An etymological analysis of diaspora reveals it as a combination of the Greek words *dia*, meaning "about or across" and *speirein*, meaning "to scatter". Put together, diaspora then assumes the meaning, "to scatter across" but is sometimes used interchangeably with "exile". The earliest use of the concept as regards the Jewish people is found in the Septuagint, particularly, Deuteronomy 28:25: "The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth."

In *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*, Safran (1991) explains the concept of diaspora and outlines standard characteristics of a diasporic community. He disagrees with Walker Connor's earlier definition of diaspora as "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (quoted in Safran, 1991:83) For Safran, the vagueness of the term means that

everybody can use it to refer to his/her own experience of removal from a homeland. This is why he outlines a criteria for judging a community as being truly diasporic thus:

> 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral", or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulted from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should , collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (83, 84).

Clifford (1994) criticizes Safran's criteria as being too exclusivist because it "identifies the phenomenon of diaspora too closely with one group" (248). This means that in the strict use of Safran's criteria, Jewish people would be the only group who can make the list of communities that can truly assume the term diaspora. Clifford (1994), again points out that, going strictly by the last three of Safran's criteria, many Jewish communities would be cut off as not being diasporic enough or not belonging to "the ideal type."

Since the mid-twentieth century, the diasporic experience of Africans have come to be accepted leading to a growing body of scholarship on the concept of the African diaspora, both old and new. It goes without gainsaying, however, that majority of scholarship on the concept of the African diaspora has focused on the experience of Africans who were forcibly scattered around the world through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. This marked the beginning of the African-American and Afro-Caribbean diaspora as we know it today. The migrant characters whose lives are under discussion in the selected texts of this study belong to the "new" African diaspora. They belong to what Robin Cohen (2008), in his typology of five diasporas calls the "labour diaspora" (61). For him, "instead of arising from a traumatic dispersal, a diaspora could be generated by emigration in

search of work … or in pursuit of trade" (61). This aptly incorporates fictional characters Abuda, Kamalu, Kaito and Ike in *Edible Bones* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.* into the new African labour diaspora. They leave their country of origin, Nigeria, with the hope of finding a well-paying job to do in the United States. The high sense of communal consciousness amongst the migrant characters coupled with their strong attachment to home fits them perfectly into Cohen's concept of the labour diaspora.

The challenges faced by African migrants is an essential aspect of the concept of the new African diaspora. From culture shock, to racism, to lack of proper residential documentation and low wages African migrants are put in a tight corner in terms of being able to achieve their goals. According to Boris Nieswand (2014), African migrants do not get the lucrative and high-earning jobs in the host countries. Citing the situation of Ghanaian migrants to Germany as an example, he notes that "The majority of migrants in Berlin, many of them documented and some undocumented, worked in low-wage segment mostly in the service sector or engaged in (more or less) precarious forms of self-employment. People who sometimes even had university education … worked in kitchens of restaurants, as cleaners, as cab drivers, construction workers, in delivery services, or were owners of small shops, many of which went bankrupt after a couple of years" (405-6). The high cost of bills in the host country coupled with the overwhelming concern for home contributes greatly to the heightened disillusionment and dogged quest for survival amongst African migrants in the host country. The consequences of the irregular status of many African migrants put them in the situation where they are willing to do just anything to regularize their stay. Gaining citizenship or permanent residency status through marriage appears to be the route that most irregular Africans take to regularize their stay in the host country.

In "Migration and Productive Investment: A Conceptual Framework", Valeria Galetto (2011), observes that the view of migration as detrimental to the development of the migrants' country of origin has changed over time. In her view the general "the consensus among researchers is that the effects of migration on development are not invariably positive or negative but, rather, are contingent on a set of factors that vary over time and across locales" (283). This view is no different from that of De Haas (2006) who opines that

> Suggesting an automatic mechanism in which migration leads to more development (or the contrary) would be to ignore the accumulated evidence pointing to the differentiated nature of the spatial, temporal, social and sector-specific impact of migration. . . Migration impacts are therefore highly context-sensitive (579).

The study of what I term as narratives of failed migrations does not fail to acknowledge the positive effect (no matter how little) of migration on the development of the country of origin. This is seen in the remittances which the migrant characters manage to send back home to assuage the difficulties of family relatives back home. Again, the latent or active expectation of return to the country of origin makes it imperative for African migrants to make investments into construction and industrial projects. For instance, Khoser (2003) notes that Ghanaian immigrants to Canada "closely monitor the price of cement in Ghana, in order to build houses at home as cheaply as possible" (1). In this is study, one observes that it is the inability of the African migrants to make such expected investments in the country of origin which leads to their disillusionment and fear of return migration.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

The study adopts the qualitative research approach. Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* serve as the primary data for this research work. This research begins by offering a background to the disillusionment and survival of African migrant characters. The background includes a synopsis of the selected texts as well as brief biographies of the selected authors. The authors' background as African immigrants in the United States helps to provide additional credence to the immigrant experiences they present in their novels. By design, the major part of this study focuses on the analysis of the disillusionment and survival strategies of the African migrant characters in the selected novels. The conclusion of this study summarizes and draws attention to the various points of convergence and divergence in the two selected texts.

Additionally, secondary sources of material for this thesis are drawn from the Balme Library and other libraries at the University of Ghana in addition to articles, interviews and book reviews online. For a study which analyses narratives of failed migrations of African characters in the United States, it takes the form of social criticism literature seeking to unravel the realities of life in the host country. Again, the study adopts the conceptual framework of the "new" African diaspora to adequately analyse the experiences of Africans who move to the United States of America in pursuit of dreams of economic success.

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

This study is a five-chapter dissertation. The first chapter offers an introductory background to the concepts and contexts of African migration and the experiences of Africans who make up the "new" African diaspora. Here, the research questions and objectives of the study are clearly stated

while the limitations and justification of the study are also marked out. The methodology and theoretical underpinnings of the study are also established and discussed in this chapter. Chapter two offers an in-depth review of literature which borders on the chosen conceptual framework in addition to critical works and reviews on the selected texts of the study. Chapter three discusses the presentation of the disillusionment and survival of African migrant characters in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* Additionally, chapter four focuses on the subject of disillusionment amongst African migrants and their strategies of survival in Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. The last chapter draws a conclusion and offers suggestions for further studies.

1.7 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of this research shall be limited to an analysis of the fictional presentation of African migrants in the United States of America whose migration dreams are unfulfilled in the two selected novels. The research takes cognisance of the fact that the field of the "new" African diaspora literature leads in many diverse and broad academic and research pathways. This researcher accepts the fact that not all migrations to the United States of American end in shattered dreams. There are those who do well for themselves and their families as a result of the decision to migrate. Such people also face different levels of challenges which include disillusionment and difficulty surviving in the host country. However, the point must be made that this study seeks to add to the broader discussion on the migrations and experiences of the "new" African diaspora.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The phenomenon of migration is on the rise in Africa. Several young talented people often make long and harrowing journeys legally and illegally to Europe and America to find what is regarded to be "greener pastures". This study opens a new window on African migration literature by narrowing down on the psychological and social experiences of Africans who fail at their attempt to achieve their migration dreams. It points away from the presentation of the West as a kind of paradise which one must get to by all means. Additionally, this study shows the growing presence of African diaspora literature which gives much attention to the "new" African diaspora.

1.9 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Together with climate change and security, Michael Werz and Max Hoffmann (2016) describes migration as a "twenty-first century challenge" (145). It is therefore appropriate that this research looks at the migrant experiences of Africans in the West in general and America in particular. Also, this study is justified by the important insights that the *Edible Bones* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.* provide on the condition of African migrants and their varying modes of survival in the host country. Again, the migrant experiences in both novels have not received much critical attention, hence, the need for this extensive study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is broken into three different compartments. The first compartment discusses the critical thoughts on the subject of migration and the representation of African migrations in literature pointing to the usefulness of bringing literary tools to bear on the study of migration. The second compartment of this work analyses the scholars' perspectives on the theoretical concept of the new African diaspora. Here, the conceptual framework is assessed, and its usefulness or otherwise to the discussion of the African migrant experience, established. The last part of this study focuses on critical voices on Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones* have had minimal critical works undertaken on them. However, the few that are available would be assessed and the perspectives that they express are delineated to reveal their relatedness or otherwise to this study.

2.2 The Phenomenon of Migration and Migration in African Literature

The phenomenon of migration, as Marie McAuliffe and Marfin Ruhs (2017) note, "stretches back to the earliest periods of human history" (1). In the specific case of Africa, migration is deeply imbued in the cultural and historical realities of most ethnic groups. For instance, the positioning of the Akan, Ewe, Ga and Dagomba ethnic groups from different parts of the continent to their present locations have all been the result of migration. It is therefore not surprising that Ghana, the name adopted for the Gold Coast at independence, connects to the historical migration of its people from the old Gaana Empire (in the region of present-day Mauritania). Even though there are records to suggest movements by Africans out of the continent before the Arabic and Trans-

Atlantic slave trades, African migration particularly reached its highest numerical records during the Trans-Alantic slave trade. Works such as Ivan Van Sertima's (2003) *They Came Before Columbus* and Vincent Bakpetu Thompson's (1987) *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas 1441-1900* point to the presence of Africans in America long before the famous explorer, Christopher Columbus, arrived in America. Sertima points to the discovery of "Africoid" stone sculptures in Mexico which outdate Columbus's arrival in the Americas (quoted in Okwepho 2001: xii). However, in the generally accepted markers of history, Isidore Okpewho posits that, it is safe to "accept the sixteenth century as the era during which black Africans began to come to the Americas in any significant numbers." The presence of Africans in Europe and the Americas came to its highest points through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The need for more hands on plantations to feed the burgeoning industries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe and America made the inhumane, dubious and destructive trade in Africans a more attractive and lucrative venture for European colonialists and merchants. Okwepho refers to this period as the period of the "labour imperative" in America. This marked the beginning of the African-American and Caribbean diaspora as we know it today.

Studies on the subject of African migrations, have for a long time been taken up within academic fields such as; Sociology, Economics, Politics etc. However, the importance of looking at the issue from the perspective of literature cannot be over-emphasized. In his article, "On the Use of Creative Literature in Migration Study" published in *Area*, Paul White (1985) makes a good case for the recognition of Creative Literature as an important tool for geographers in their quest to study different aspects of the human condition in a globalized world. The article particularly investigates how interdisciplinary academic collaborations between creative writing and areas of

social science such as Geography can lead to important findings about the phenomenon of migration. He observes that creative writing has often been used by geographers to understand the concept of "place". He cites, for instance, Claude Soucy's analyses of the "image of the city centre" through the use of four French novels as an example of how geographers' recourse to creative writing can provide a fuller perspective on the subject of "place". By the same token, White advocates the fresh perspectives and deeper insights that creative writing brings to the discussion of the subject of migration to be looked at again. He explores the challenges migrant characters face when they arrive in France in the area of housing through the novel of Algerian writer, Mehdi Charef. Again, using Lera's *Tierra Para Morir*, White brings out the peculiarities of Spanish migrant workers in Germany who return to their various villages and towns. The pressing needs of returnee migrants are properly highlighted here. For White, an interdisciplinary approach to migration leads to a deeper and broader comprehension of the issue. By looking at novels which present immigrant themes, White posits that researchers in Geography can better learn about the nature of migration. Paul White's research in the aforementioned article differ from what this research sets out to do. The difference emanates from the different scopes that are adopted. While White examines guest workers in Northern Europe in his research, this researcher sets out to examine the disillusioned lives of African migrants in the United States of America.

Talking about the phenomenon of migration is not new in African literature. From texts as old as J. E. Casely-Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) and Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1915), the subject of Africans moving outside the continent is treated. However, the point must be made that such movements were largely temporary in terms of purpose; brief visits, education and consultation and occasional petitioning of the colonial government. Adebayo Oyebade and Toyin

Falola (2016) posit that Africans who went to the United States before the 1970s saw it as "a temporary place of sojourn for Africans, most … were students who had come to tap the American educational system. As temporary sojourners, these students generally returned to their respective countries at the end of their studies to contribute to their nation's development" (4).

The trend of talking about migration continued from the early twentieth century into the era of what Adesanmi and Dunton (2005) classify as the "first", "second" and "third" generations of African writers. Examples of first generation texts which touch on migration include; Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1974) and Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977). The quest for education, threats to their lives and upheavals in the post-independent nation-states of Africa amongst other factors sent African writers packing out of their country and the continent. Omolola A. Ladele and Adesunmbo E. Omotayo (2017) expatiate on the exodus of African writers thus:

> African writers have themselves for long been caught in the flux and flows of migration. Particularly in the period of the ferment of patriotic and nationalist calls for self-rule and independence, many writers had to seek safe havens in neighbouring countries or in distant lands in Britain, Europe and America. Thus, from about the late fifties a tradition of exilic writers began to emerge. Writing from the diaspora, such writers were Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, Doris Lessing, Alex La Guma, and Dennis Brutus among several others. Characterizing their literary productions were motifs and tropes of alienation, isolation and aloneness. (53)

In her book, *Translated People, Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Literature* (2014), Tina Steiner analyses the creative works of Leila Aboulela, Jamal Mahjoub from Sudan, and Abdulrazak Gurnah and Moyez G. Vassanji from Tanzania. She examines the practise whereby African migrants tend to carry along their religious, social and linguistic experiences from the country of origin to their respective host countries. Resorting to "cultural translation", Steiner juxtaposes the culture of the migrant characters' countries of origin

with the one in the host country. She defines a translated migrant character, as "one who migrated from Africa to the West and thus occupies interstices of different cultures and languages and accesses different ways of knowing and representing the world" (2). All the writers whose works Steiner examines in *Translated People, Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Literature* are migrants who, themselves, may be rightfully described as "translated people". They therefore create migrant characters who in turn become translated people in translated texts.

For Steiner, the process of "translation" involves "the multiple interactions of living and writing in an intercultural and interlinguistic space" (3). The cultural differences of both the country of origin and the host country are put together and projected textual production. For instance, in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Steiner looks at how Sammar, the main character of Aboulela's novel, translates and adapts the principles and tenets of Islam into her new life as a migrant in Scotland. Steiner's study is similar to what this researcher undertakes in this research, basically, because it analyses the migrant as one who has the task of balancing his experience of home with the conditions he or she faces abroad. The divergence however, lies in the fact that this study narrows down on the narratives of failed migrations and how the African migrant characters manage to survive in the host country.

Additionally, Koskei Margaret Chepkorir's, Master of Arts thesis (2014) entitled, *Representation of Female African Immigrant Experience in the West: A Case Study of Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah* deals with the portrayal of the African woman in Adichie's *Americanah.* It assesses varying challenges that female migrant characters are faced with in the host country. Chepkorir

(2014) posits that female migrants manage to survive the harsh conditions of life out there in the West because they are community-oriented. They quickly form closely-knit relationships which help them to assist each other whenever the need arises. She places side-by-side the immigrant experiences of both male and female migrants. Because of the feminist angle that Chepkorir adopts in her study, she tends to present the female migrant as being unfairly treated by male domination. Apart from discussing the experiences of female African migrants in the West, Chepkorir also looks at what she calls "Adichie's vision" for the female African identity both in the West and elsewhere. She discusses the famous "hair politics" of Adichie and indicates that when African women stick to their natural self, they demonstrate a strong sense of self-worth rather than when they imitate anything they see coming from the West in the name of fashion. While Chepkorir looks at the immigrant experiences of the female migrant, this study examines the general conditions of the African migrant's disillusionment as expressed in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*. In terms of theory, while Chepkorir's research adopts the feminist literary theory, this present research embraces diaspora theory and the migration theories of "migration culture" and return migration tools for academic criticism.

In *A New Generation of African Writers: Migration, Material Culture and Language*, Brenda Cooper shows an interesting paradigm in migration studies by focusing on the journeys of African protagonists who carry certain material objects along with them as they migrate from their home countries. These objects become important reminders of home and its varying experiences. The works that Cooper focuses her analysis on are Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator and Coloured Lights*, Jamal Mahjoub's *The Carrier*, Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles,* and then in two chapters, Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun.* Cooper shows how the ordinary daily experiences of the migrant in his country of origin are carried over

on his or her journey to the host country. Brenda Cooper's research differs from this present study in the sense that while this research focuses on the disillusioned condition of the African migrant, hers deals with the place of the material culture and language of the African migrant in his or her life in the host country.

In her article, "Has African Migration to the U.S. Led to a Literary Renaissance?", Yogita Goyal, looks at how African migrations to the U.S. has influenced the emergence of what Taiye Selasi refers to as "Afropolitan" literature which forms a microcosm of the general field of African migration literature. Recounting the history of recent African migrations to the U.S., Goyal, quoting Selasi, observes that,

> Starting in the 1960s, the young, gifted and broke left Africa in pursuit of higher education and happiness abroad . . . Some three decades later this scattered tribe of pharmacists, physicists, physicians (and the odd polygamist) has set up camp around the globe ... Somewhere between the 1988 release of *Coming to America* and the 2001 crowning of a Nigerian Miss World, the general image of young Africans in the West transmorphed from goofy to gorgeous. (https://lithub.com/has-african-migration-to-the-us-led-to-a-literary-renaissance/)

Goyal argues that the migration of Africans across the world has led to the production of literary works which present fresh perspectives on the African identity in a globalized world. In Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, for instance, she presents African characters who through their itinerancy and demonstration of their intelligence and self-confidence show "multiple ways of being African". For Goyal, the literary productions of African writers such as Teju Cole, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Dinaw Mengestu, Binyavanga Wainaina amongst others constitute an "African literary renaissance" which breathes some freshness into the African narrative scene. Their works are particularly important because they offer new ways of conceptualizing the African diaspora. This is no less significant a contribution to the study of the concept of the African diaspora in literature as such works "decisively shift away from existing templates of Atlantic slavery, insisting on new frames for fathoming contemporary patterns of migration." As Goyal notes,

> Most of the prominent theories of diaspora over the last two decades have been galvanized by the aspirations and contradictions of the journeys of a W. E. B. Du Bois or a Richard Wright. The new visibility of African writers is a welcome antidote to such tendencies. Yet to open up the script

> of diaspora itself, we still need more multifaceted histories and models of what such visibility entails or enables.

Here, Goyal points the emergence of African migration literature as offering new trajectories for the study of the concept of the African diaspora. This is no different from Aretha Phiri whose thoughts on the contribution of African diasporic literature can be easily pre-empted from a casual reading of her article's title; "Literature by Africans in the Diaspora Can Help Create Alternative Narratives." For Phiri, literature by Africans in the diaspora goes away from the "nativist interpretation" of the realities of the African life. In her view, the Afrodiasporic literature takes readers into

> subjectivities beyond their national and personal borders. We exist in a time of profound global cultural flux. Against this backdrop, inflexible and insular readings of both Africa and Africans do not adequately interpret the diversity and complexity of their own subjective realities. Contemporary Afrodiasporic literature's worldly reinterpretation of Africa and Africans presents imaginatively inclusive visions. In its responsiveness to ever-shifting contexts and realities, it is committed to revealing what author Ben Okri calls the "strange corners of what it means to be human."

The global perspective on the African life is significantly enhanced by the writings of Africans who have migrated outside the continent. This is because through migration, they gain experience as Africans looking in from the outside realm. Thus, leading to the ability to properly capture the experiences of Africans both in and outside the continent. The writings of Afrodiasporic writers do enhance the richness of African migration literature and African literature in general.

2.3 The Concept of the New African Diaspora

That African migration literature connects safely with the experiences of the new African diaspora is not far-fetched. Ali Mazrui (2001) refers to the new African diaspora as the "diaspora of colonialism" while Erieka Bennett, Diaspora Ambassador to Ghana, in an interview with Ghanaian YouTuber, Wode Maya, calls it "continental diaspora". Oyebade and Falola (2016) define the new

African diaspora as "a community of blacks born in Africa, and who are recent immigrants to the United States" (1). In their view, this community includes; "naturalized American citizens, lawful permanent residents (i.e. "Green Card" holders), temporary migrants (i.e. foreign students), refugees and asylum grantees, and illegal immigrants" (2). The African-born population in the United States is by no means homogeneous. They come from all parts of Africa. According of the US Census Bureau, about 46 percent of the African-born population is from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Egypt.

In his much cited article published in the *New York Times* in 2005, Sam Roberts reveals that "for the first time, more blacks are coming to the United States from Africa than during the slave trade." This draws immediate attention to the new migration trends amongst Africans and the formation of a new African diaspora in the United States. In his analysis of Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007), Louis Chude-Sokei (2014) paints a picture of the polarity in the American society between White and Black American approaches to things. He points to the socio-cultural and political conundrum that the African immigrant finds himself or herself in when torn between these two approaches. Naturally, one would expect African immigrants to find affinity with African American standpoints. However, African immigrants, owing to their varying experiences of colonial and post-colonial life experience the American socio-cultural and political conditions differently. As Chude-Sokei clearly states:

> African immigrants, as evident in this literature as in the now-growing body of research, do not necessarily experience or respond to racism in the same way or share the same notions of identity or affiliation as African Americans. They also do not imagine themselves "white" or necessarily see whiteness as a position of desirable privilege. Yet they are expected to assimilate into either a white American and/or a 'black' social world that may exhibit its own prejudices against them. (55)

In "Sound Statements and Counterpoints: Ike Oguine's Channeling of Music, Highlife, and Jazz in *A Squatter's Tale,*" Christopher N. Okonkwo (2019) admits to the "frosty relationships and exchanges between African and African American students at many of the nation's colleges that one hears about anecdotally" (629). He cites the case of Samuel L. Jackson's criticism of Jordan Peele's use of Daniel Kaluuya, a Ugandan-born and British-raised actor as the main character in his debut film, *Get Out* in 2017 as one which highlights the growing interest in pointing out a difference between African Americans and Africans who came to America long after slavery was abolished. Inasmuch as there exists gaping difference between Africans who came to America during and after slavery, Okonkwo emphasizes that there exists "sound … linkages of black world music and, with that, the unbroken ties and relatabilities of African America and Nigeria/Africa" (630).

Chude-Sokei (2014) refers to Africans who came to America long after independence as "the newly black Americans" (53). Historically, according Chude-Sokei the formation of "the newly black Americans" began with the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 which granted permit to non-white immigrants travelling to live in the United States. Africans who move to the United States included professionals like writers, teachers, doctors, pharmacists amongst others. As migrants themselves, Afrodiasporic writers draw from their first-hand experience of life outside their countries of origin. Tanure Ojaide (2008) captures this succinctly when she notes:

> African writers have become part of the worldwide phenomena of migration and globalization with the attendant physical, sociocultural, psychic, and other forms of dislocation, which permeate their individual writings. Migration, globalization and the related phenomena of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content, and form of the literary production of Africans abroad. (p.43, quoted in Ladele and Omotayo 2017)

Their personal experiences of racism, "otherness", and difficulty of integration into the culture of the host country provide rich material for their fictional works. The novels of Teju Cole, Unoma Azuah, Okey Ndibe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie amongst others concerning the vicissitudes of life for the African immigrant in America are largely based on their own experiences of migration.

2.4 Critical Voices on the Selected Texts

Foreign Gods, Inc. – Okey Ndibe

Mathias Nilges (2017) classifies Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* under the "'going back' to Africa novel" (178). Discussing the complexities and multiple layers of contemporaneity, Nilges identifies a contradiction between the reportage on conditions in Africa and the realities on the ground. In this article, Nilges refers to the tongue-in-cheek advice that Binyavanga Wainaina (2006) gives to writers on the subject of Africa. Wainaina mockingly advises that the best way to write about Africa is to portray the continent as a backward, uncivilized, primal world totally cut off from contemporary knowledge and technology. "Darkness", "Safari", "Masai", "Zulu", etc are words which Wainaina sarcastically says must be included in the titles and sub-titles of books on Africa. To Wainaina, such words feed the stereotypical notions of the global North about Africa. They are therefore most likely to respond favourably to such books in terms of parting with cash to get them. The crust of Wainaina's argument in the article which Nilges refers to is that things have changed from the past negative stereotypes with which the African continent was associated. Nilges disagrees with the negative perceptions of Africa and points to the significant changes and contemporaneity that one observes in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.* when the main character, Ikechukwu returns to his riverine village of Utonki. Even though, Ike finds certain notable European and North American exports in his village, Nilges posits that there is a difference

between the levels of contemporaneity that one finds in Africa and America. Nilges points to the centrality of capital in exposing "the even inclusion in or direct exclusion from the system" of contemporaneity. While Nilges' work focuses primarily on the "going back" part of *Foreign Gods Inc.* and the relationship between contemporaneity and capital, this study explores the general principles of migration of Africans to the West and the strategies of survival they adopt in the host country.

In his book review of Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* which he entitles, "In Pursuit of a Wooden God", Ronald Adamolekun describes the novel as "an overwhelming triumph, a bold testament to the invincible power of imagination and also to the ruinous obsession of its protagonist." He calls the seeming similarity between Ndibe's prose style and Chinua Achebe's as a result of "inspiration" and not "imitation". Indeed, Ndibe, in the acknowledgement section of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* mentions Achebe as a one of the writers who have taught him "much about life and literature". Adamolekun cites the closeness of the similarity of the title of Ndibe's debut novel, *Arrows of Rain* and Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Ndibe's deployment of the nuances in the ethical values of the Igbo people in his latest novel, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* as evidence of Achebe's influence on Ndibe. Nonetheless, Adamolekun points to the picture of contemporaneity that Ndibe paints for the village of Utonki as being exaggerated and "overdone". Even though, Adamolekun, in his review of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* touches on the immigrant situation of Ike, it appears to be insufficient compared to this study. This study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the African migrant experience, attempts to survive and later return home.

***Edible Bones* – Unoma Azuah**

In "Chewing on the Bones of Migration: A Review of Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones*", Yomi Ogunsanya hails Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* it as "a rich exploration of exilic/émigré conditions

and consequences". He draws a connection between Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and *Edible Bones*, the connecting line being their "profound reflections on migrant subjects and migration in the present transnational world of commodity/human traffic and travels". After giving a brief synopsis of the novel, Ogunsanya posits that *Edible Bones* captures the salient issues of homelessness, deception by con artists, imprisonment, false marriages among migrants as part of the commonplace realities of African migrants in the West. He particularly expresses his admiration for what he calls Unoma Azuah's "courage" to bring up the matter of homosexuality for discussion in her novel. This is not unlike Azuah. She has been very much interested in the subject of sexual orientations other than the popular and more readily acceptable heterosexual relationships in African. In an interview with the Nigerian *Vanguard* newspaper, Azuah reveals why she touches on the subject of homosexuality and homophobia. She tells the reporter, Sylva Nze Ifedigbo;

> I've always explored the theme of sexuality in my writing, especially in my poems and non-fiction pieces. Edible Bones is actually inspired by a true story. The life of the major character loosely reflects the life of a Nigerian immigrant I met. He happened to be highly homophobic, but when he goes to jail and becomes a point of attention for bullies, a homosexual guy happens to be his savior. That singular experience transformed him. I was amazed by his transformation and feel that it is a worthy sub-plot. I also wanted to use that vehicle to show that being overly judgmental never helps anyone in the long run, and unfair discrimination should not be encouraged.

In June, 2016, *Blessed Body: The Secret Lives of Nigerian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender* was launched by Azuah in Nigeria. This publication chronicles the lived experiences of Nigerians who fall outside the circle of heteronormative relationships. It puts Azuah's concern for non-heterosexual marriages into the limelight.

In *Edible Bones*, Kaito's reaction to gay people moves from outright rejection to tolerance. Even though Kaito, while in prison, would not become gay himself, he appears to accept the reasons

espoused by gay inmates such as Zulkibulu that homosexual relationships are as normal as heterosexual ones. This is very much in line with the story the Nigerian immigrant Azuah tells in the quotation above. However, Ogunsanya describes Unoma Azuah's prose style as "bland". To him, Azuah appears to be "more interested in telling her story than the kind of prose she used in telling her story". This assertion by Ogunsanya does not hold because one observes Azuah's masterful use of suspense, verisimilitude and narrative technique etc which are some of the most admired elements of prose writing. While the nature of a book review restricts a fuller analysis of *Edible Bones*, this thesis enjoys ample space for a proper dissection of the subject of migrant disillusionment and survival in the host country.

John McAllister, in a blurb commentary on Demarche Publishing's version of *Edible Bones*, praises the novel as being an "an unrelenting, though often very funny, anatomy of a world so consumed by the struggle for money, luxury, and status that no alternative seems possible anymore." He identifies the quest for materialism as one of the main driving forces behind the recent surge in African migrations. He, however, admits that the ring in which African migrants seek the fulfilment of their dreams shows little or no mercy. He describes the love relationships of the characters as being "as mercenary and hollow as the world outside." Instead of finding solace in their relationships, Kaito and Abuda fall into deeper and deeper depression as a result of their love relationships. McAllister's thoughts on the difficulties African migrants face in their quest to attain material success are shared by Nigerian literary journalist, Joseph Omotayo. For him, "Nigeria may be a home of wants; America is [not] a land of easy coins." People are not able to accept this reality of migration because they eagerly hold on to the embellished stories of easy wealth that returnee migrants and the media through films portray of the United States of America and the West in general. The reality of life in the United States of America becomes clear to Kaito

long after he arrives there. This leaves him depressed and highly disillusioned to the extent that sometimes "he laid in the dark and cried himself to sleep" (80) and at other times he "sat down on the only couch in the room, rested his head on his hand, and wept like a baby" (89, 90). It is only after experiencing the realities of life in America that Kaito realizes Omotayo's point that "America is [not] a land of easy coins."

CHAPTER THREE

MIGRANT DISILLUSIONMENT AND SURVIVAL IN UNOMA AZUAH'S *EDIBLE BONES*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Disillusionment in African literature is often associated with the works of African writers who Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton (2005: 14) describe as constituting the "first generation" of African writers. African writers such as Chinua Achebe, T. M. Aluko, Amos Tutuola, Efua Sutherland, Flora Nwapa, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Amu Djoleto amongst others fall into this category. These writers present in their works, characters who are completely disillusioned with the downward spiral the new independent nation-states of Africa seem to have fallen into. The heightened state of corruption, bribery, greed and the looting of public funds dry up people's wells of hope for the future of Africa. Joe E. Obi Jr. (1990) describes the works of the first generation of African writers as the "disillusionment novel" (400). For Adesanmi and Dunton, "the second generation were also born into the colonial event and their formative years were mostly shaped by independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis" (14).

However, the harrowing experiences of African migrants to the West also present another aspect of disillusionment in African literature. This migration-related disillusionment is captured by writers of the second and third generations of African literature. Most of such writers themselves have experienced life in the West and seen first-hand the changes and destabilizations that comes as consequences of migration. The agenda to migrate out of the continent through regular or irregular means appears to be motivated largely by the unbearable state of affairs in the country of origin. The dichotomy between the African migrant's vision and imagination of pleasantness in the West and the reality of hardships and challenges there becomes the main cause of disillusionment when migrants eventually arrive in the host country. This chapter discusses Unoma

Azuah's presentation of the pre and post migration disillusionment of African migrants to the West and their varying strategies of survival in *Edible Bones*.

3.2 CONTEXTS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

The migration of Africans to the West is usually predicated on certain factors and needs. These factors and needs tend to be the compelling reasons for the outward movement of African migrants. The African migrants Azuah presents in *Edible Bones* find themselves at different stages of disillusionment and disenchantment in the West. The cause of their deep disillusionment and disenchantment is apparent in the circumstances which surround their departure to the West. In his poem, "The Weaver Bird", Kofi Awoonor alludes to the fact that migrations from home become the order of the day when one's "home" is destroyed. Africans "look for new homes every day" because conditions at home have been adversely affected by misrule, unemployment etc. The contexts of departure of African migrants in *Edible Bones* provide a good background information for the disillusionment they experience in the host country and the impact it has on their later decisions concerning their survival there.

3.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF PLEASANTNESS

The United States of America has for many centuries been portrayed as the land of migrant dreams. Right from the Puritans journeying in the *Mayflower*, to the large exodus of Europeans who moved to the United States of America in the early and mid-twentieth century, people have always looked to it as a land of prosperity, freedom and safety. As Antonio Marquez (1983) notes in his article, "The American Dream and the Chicano Novel", "from a literary perspective the theme of a people seeking America, finding it, achieving the dream, or conversely suffering disillusionment and exploitation, has produced extraordinary works..." (4).This same dream of achievement, success

and its attendant disillusionment also pervade the African literary works on migration. The would-be migrant characters in such works maintain a positive and powerful perception of life in America. The would-be African migrant's perceptions of the living conditions in the West is largely gained through media sources such as television, movies, the internet etc. The oral, sometimes exaggerated, accounts of returnee migrants also prop up the would-be migrant's perception of life in the West. Easy access to hard currency, a good life of pleasure in nightclubs, good food, comfort etc. appear to get the better of such Africans. They therefore become blind and deaf to accounts which may reflect the realities of life in the West. The utopic view of African migrants concerning life in the West becomes glaring when one observes what the visa applicants go through during the visa application process. They show resilience and faith with the hope that life on the other side would definitely be better than it is in the home country.

In the prologue to the novel, the narrator paints an insightful and instructive picture which reflects the migrants' pre-migration perceptions of pleasantness on the other side. Unoma Azuah adopts an omniscient narrator or point of view to tell the story. This narrative strategy gives the narrator some amount of distancing and at the same time a good vantage point from which she gets an unlimited access to the events in the story as well as the lives of characters in it.

> It was 4 a.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. …The mass of people huddled together like a herd of cattle determined to get to the greener pasture on the other side, furious to reach the entrance of the golden gate. (6, 7)

First of all, the time at which the would-be migrants arrive at the American Embassy in Lagos for the processing of their visa application reflects their eagerness, diligence and commitment to the journey to the West. For an Embassy that starts work at 8.30 a.m., arriving at 4 a.m. is extraordinarily early. However, the would-be migrants choose to arrive extraordinarily early

because they do not want to miss their appointment. The narrator describes the would-be migrants as "a large crowd" who "had lined up like a trail of ants at the American Embassy in Lagos" (6). This shows that quite a lot of people seek to leave the country. The narrator's comparison of some of the would-be migrants to "a trail of ants" suggests a picture of discipline and orderliness. While others "milled around the entrance gate" in the hope of getting into the Embassy when it opens, others maintain their composure in the hope of being served early. The narrator's description of the orderliness and chaos of would-be migrants reflects eagerness in both cases.

A similar picture of the would-be African migrants' resilience at the American embassy is painted by Chimamanda Adichie in "The American Embassy", a short story in her collection entitled, *The Thing around Your Neck*. The narrator describes the demeanour of one of the visa applicants thus: "She stood in line outside the American embassy in Lagos, staring straight ahead, barely moving, a blue plastic file of documents tucked under her arm. She was the forty-eighth person in the line of about two hundred that trailed from the closed gates of the American embassy all the way past the smaller, vine-encrusted gates of the Czech embassy" (143). Just as it is the case in Edible Bones, in "The American Embassy", the would-be migrants endure the stress of standing for long hours in long queues before they are eventually served. When the embassy gates finally opens, a worker announces "First fifty on the line, come in and fill out the forms. All the rest, come back another day. The embassy can attend to only fifty today." This announcement crushes the hopes of the would-be-migrants who fall outside the scheduled number to be served. The quota system the embassy operates explains why some would-be migrants choose to arrive perilously early. Those who fall into the number for the day's quota celebrate it as a blessing even though it is not automatic that their visa applications would be approved. After the embassy worker announces the number they can see for the day, one of the visa applicants asks the main character of the short

story, "We are lucky abi?" (155). Even though many of these would-be migrants are eventually denied the visa, they see the mere opportunity to present their documents and be interviewed as a step closer to their destination.

Again, one observes the African migrant's perceptions of pleasantness in the West in the narrator's use of two glorified and satisfying images of the West. The narrator describes the crowd of applicants as "a herd of cattle determined to get to the greener pasture on the other side" while the Embassy's entrance is described as "the golden gate." The image of cattle seeking "greener pasture" shows that the people expect to have their every need provided for once they get to the other side. The imagery of the greener pasture also depicts the disillusionment of the would-be African migrant concerning life at home. The grass may be green at home. However, all that the would-be African migrants see beyond the horizon is "a greener pasture on the other side" (7). They therefore choose life abroad over life in the home country. In addition, the imagery of the "golden gate" projects the perception of African migrants that life in the United States of America is synonymous to life in heaven. This perception is later reinforced by Bola, one of Kaito's friends' reference to the United States of America as "God's own country" (198). Even more, the Biblical allusion of the United States of America as divine comes when a few of the visa applicants gather to say a word of prayer.

> A group of three women and two men formed a circle and yowled in prayer. "We claim that path you have made for us in the Red Sea! We claim our path to America! Lawd, yes! We are the children of Abraham, and the world is ours to have and live. We banish and cast out all principalities and powers that have tried to block these gates because we know that the devil is the father of all liars! Yes lawd," the women proclaimed simultaneously. The men patted their legs with their Bibles repeatedly, crying out, "in Jesus name!" (8)

In the above prayer, the visa applicant uses epithets which allude to the United States of America as some kind of a promised land which God has vowed to grant them entry into. The perception

of the United States of America as a promised land reveals the kind of pleasantness these would-be African migrants imagine to exist in there, and for which reason they use all means to get there. If they are denied the visa, they know who to blame; "the principalities and powers who have tried to block these gates" (8).

3.2.2 MISRULE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The staggering unemployment situation and the lack of some basic amenities in the Nigerian society Azuah portrays in *Edible Bones* demonstrates the bad governance of the country by the nation's leaders. The kind of misrule that bedevils the nation is a key factor which makes several young people to desire to leave the country. No wonder then that the narrator estimates the visa applicants to be a "mass of people" (6). Huge numbers of the people are on their way out of the country because of the terrible living conditions even for the educated people in the nation. For instance, Kaito spends several years after his first degree looking for a job. When he eventually finds a job, it is not one for which his academic competence is a major requirement. Kaito's only qualification is based "on his physical build. He became a security guard at the American Embassy in Nigeria. All his friends envied him" (26). It appears all the years of studying theories and concepts in his History class in the university becomes of very minimal use to him on his new-found job. The work of a security guard in most African countries is a low-paying one. However, for Kaito, it is a prestigious job which he is so happy to have. No wonder "all his friends envied him." The envy of Kaito's friends suggests that their own situation is terrible. It is apparent that to work as a security guard for any company would suffice for them; so to have to do this work at the American Embassy adds a certain level of prestige to it. Not only are his friends happy for him, "though Kaito never suspected that he would end up being a security guard, he was happy he finally found a job" (58). In essence, for Kaito half a loaf is better than none. Later when Kaito

gets to America, the narrator recalls how Kaito's experience of unemployment affects his love relationship negatively. He loses the opportunity to marry Mende, his love from school to "an older rich man" (58) because "Kaito was unemployed for years after graduation and Mende could not wait for him to get a job" (58). This shows that the stark unemployment situation in the country do not only push the young people out of the country, it also affects the social aspects of their lives adversely.

The lack of basic social and economic amenities such as constant electricity, good roads and potable drinking water in the country make life in their country of origin to be so unbearable that the only good future they imagine for themselves is out there in the West. Even though Kaito sees remarkable changes in the lives of some of his friends when he eventually returns home from America, not much has changed in the general conditions in the country; "hillside garbage heaps" (194), "people hawking by the road sides with kerosene lanterns" (194) "bumps of the pothole" (195) and "more bumps from the potholes" (195). These uncomfortable conditions which are symptomatic of misrule, leads to disaffection amongst the citizenry. When Kaito returns to Nigeria after his journey to America, he and Jemina could barely sleep at night because of the darkness and heat in their rooms because there is no electricity. When they get fuel to power their generator, its sound becomes another worry they have to contend with. The discomforts that Kaito and Jemina go through in Lagos is no different from what people endure in Kaito's village, Ugbeje. When his son and his wife come there, Kaito's mother apologizes to Jemina for the heat in their house. She explains that the situation has been so for the past five days; "I am sorry; we have not had light in five days now" (219). In response, startled Jemina says, "… but five days? How do you survive?" (219). Surviving in such a condition is much unbearable, hence, Uncle Kam's advise to Kaito to celebrate his journey to the United States of America because many are dying to be in his shoes

(229). In addition, the narrator describes the road to Ugbeje village as a "path" with "deep holes." Even though it was not wet season, the road had become "muddy." When Jemina asks why the road is so bad, Kaito tries to save the face of his people by blaming the topography of the land: "their land was marshy and always waterlogged" (216). In actual fact, Kaito ought to have pointed to misrule and bad governance as the cause of the terrible nature of the road that leads to the village.

Bad governance stresses young people to the extent that it pushes them to defy all odds to travel outside the country. Uncle Kam, one of Kaito's extended family relatives, for instance, is so disenchanted about the misrule in the country that he "…regrets the independence from the British – that the country would have been better off if it were still under British rule" (229). He goes on to stress to Kaito that "in fact, some able-bodied young men like you are praying for the return of the slave trade. They say that they would willingly dive into the slave ships; there would be no need to be captured; they would willingly show up or wait to be captured" (229). From the words of Uncle Kam, one observes a strong disaffection with the governance of the nation. He establishes a strong link between the kind of misrule that the country has been made to suffer at the hands of its leaders and the desire for many young people to leave the country. Even though his talk about people's desire for a possible return of the slave trade may appear extreme, he tells Jemina, "but that is the fact … Thousands are already doing it – trying to get to Spain through North Africa for example. Many die in the process" (229). Unfortunately, this is Africa's reality today. The death of young African migrants trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea has become a daily occurrence. News from traditional and social media are replete with such stories. Cardinal John Onayeikan, Catholic Archbishop in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, speaking to news reporters on 6th May, 2019 expresses similar sentiments to Uncle Kam. He is strongly incensed by the regular flow of young Nigerians towards the Mediterranean. However, he lays the blame squarely at the hands

of bad governance. For him, the failure of leadership has made Nigeria to be increasingly "uninhabitable" for young people living in Nigeria.

3.2.3 MIGRATION AND SOCIAL STATUS ENHANCEMENT

Another important context for the African migrants' move to the West is the enhancement that their journey brings to their status in society. Many of the characters in *Edible Bones* see migration as an effective avenue for acquiring wealth. This is because many of those who migrate to the West return showing considerable amount of cash and other material possessions. The show of affluence attracts a certain level of respect from their friends and family because of the perception that the journey makes them far better off than the rest back home. Because Kaito becomes a been-to, his family and friends regard him as one who is financially sound. Therefore those who come around him expect to take from him rather than give to him. For instance, when Kaito meets his friends at "Hot Spot", a restaurant in Lagos, they refuse to make any payments for the meals they eat.

> They talked and walked up to the counter to place their orders. Mezi and Jamma made their orders first: jumbo fried rice with two extra jumbo fried chicken, then two drinks – a whopping 1200 naira for each order. They must have done well for themselves, Kaito thought. But then they stared at him to pay up. He cast a look of surprise at them. The long pause was delaying other people's eagerness to also make their orders. He paid with a shrug. With their trays of food, they walked down to a comfortable cozy corner; it was close to a wide glass window. They sat down. As they settled in for the food, Mezi opened the two drinks: one Star beer and a bottle of Malt. He proceeded to mix them in a long glass. Kaito had assumed that the drinks were for all of them. Then Jamma neatly wrapped the jumbo fried chicken and rice and shoved them into his brief case. He then dug into the extra chicken. Mezi did the same. He had a bag pack. Kaito was trying so hard not to show his surprise. (209)

From the above extract, one observes Mezi and Jamma's perception that, insofar as Kaito has been to America, his social and financial status must have been massively enhanced. Later in the novel, the narrator reveals Jamma and Mezi's professions; Mezi is a police officer while Jamma is a

journalist. However, they relate with Kaito as though he were a millionaire. They see his position as one which they would die to annex. Jamma's admiration of Kaito's enhanced status is seen in his reference to him as "Americana" (209). Kaito's association with the United States of America is in itself a thing of prestige and envy. Mezi advises Kaito to "try to be like other people who come home millionaires or just give me your passport. I will help you make the money when I get there" (210). In the same vein, Bola, one of Kaito's friends, counsels him not to worry about his disappointing experience of the United States of America because "being in America is enough for some people" (199). He advises Kaito not to see himself as a failure because the mere fact of his stepping foot in the United States of America boosts his social standing.

Again, the regular visits by the members of the migrant's extended family on his return do not only show brotherliness and felicitations, they also project the enhancement of his or her status in the family and society at large. They come to see how well he has done for himself and also to receive their share of the goodies that the migrant brings back home. The visit by Uncle Kam and his family is a case in point. Aside the usual exchange of pleasantries, the unscripted tradition demands that Kaito gets something for Uncle Kam and the others who visit. The gift given speaks a lot about how well the returnee migrant has done for himself. Before Uncle Kam's wife leaves Kaito's mother's house, Kaito gives her fifty dollars as a parting gift. He also gets Uncle Kam's children smaller gifts from America.

The situation of social status enhancement in Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* is not different from what pertains in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*. Travelling to Europe or the United States of America is not only seen to be prestigious for the migrant. It is also a thing of pride for the family he or she comes from. The fact of their family relative travelling earns them a certain amount of

respect from others in the community. Mara recounts how her journey to Europe brought her family increased social acceptance.

> That I was travelling to Europe raised me in the esteem of my family in the village so much that mother didn't even care any longer about the beads she had to sell. Suddenly, people were greeting her with low respectful bows and mothers were warning their children to handle my two sons with respect and care during play. (p. 54)

Family members encourage and willingly offer financial support for their relatives to be able to travel to the West. In the case of Mara, her mother "didn't even care any longer about the beads she had to sell" to raise money for her daughter to make the journey considering the financial and social dividends she would possibly reap in future.

3.3 REALITY AND SHOCK

Many African migrants to the West are oblivious of the prevailing work and living systems there. They are moved largely by the perception that things are definitely better on the other side. Improving their economic and living conditions is all that they look out for. However, on reaching the West, African migrants come face-to-face with the realities of the stringent measures that govern life in the West. In their bid to improve their lives, many Africans, like Kaito, enter the United States legally but end up overstaying their visas. John Arthur aptly captures this in his article, "Searching for Promised Lands: Conceptualization of the African Diaspora in Migration" when he states that "the majority of Africans in the diaspora enter the United States, Canada and other Western countries legally as students, visitors, refugees, or to conduct business. Many overstay their visas and do not return even if it means they have to join the ranks of the twelve million undocumented and find work in the underground economy" (Arthur, 2012: 6). Kaito falls squarely into this category of African migrants. When he arrives in America, Kaito just cannot

wait to make money and acquire wealth. He happily proclaims to Kamalu, his Nigerian host, "Man. I can't wait to settle in with you and begin to make fat American money" (25). Kaito's perception of making "fat American money" becomes illusory as he comes to know of the realities of working as an irregular migrant. For Kamalu who has lived in the United States of America for three years, Kaito's suggestion of acquiring much wealth in a very short time is laughable.

> Kamalu laughed at him and schooled him on the laws of social security numbers, employment and the hounds called immigration officers. Kaito could feel the sudden sweat on his body. He was full of questions. Each response from Kamalu made him confused.
>
> "So what do I do?"
>
> "I don't know. We could start with Amin. If he agrees to offer you a job and pay you under the table you'll be lucky."
>
> Fraught with nervousness, Kaito felt on the verge of a panic attack. … He winced at the thought of telling his family and friends that he couldn't make it in America. They would ask him if the other Nigerians who sent cars and built mansions were more intelligent, if they had two heads and he had only one head. There must be another way, he thought. Kamalu must have been too slow not to have made it in America in three years. (25, 26)

When reality dawns on Kaito, he gets extremely shocked. His felling of "a sudden sweat on his body" reflects his psychological and emotional shock that hits him. He cannot believe that life in the United States of America is not as easy as he initially thought. The tree which has dollars for its leaves does not exist after all. As a person who has lost his legal status due to overstaying his visa, Kaito has no legally recognizable documentation with which he may work. It is worth mentioning that Kaito's visitor visa, even if valid, does not permit him to engage in a paid job in the country. The only way out for Kaito is to get a job which does not require any official documentation. This is why Kamalu advises him to try his luck with Amin who may be willing to pay him "under the table" without any official paper work. Kaito indeed does take a job in Amin's store as a salesperson. He earns only "half of the national minimum wage" at Amin's place. In his state of shock and confusion, one observes a residue of hope in Kaito. He appears not to be fully

convinced with the reality of things in America. He therefore assures himself that "there must be another way" (26) to go around the quagmire he finds himself in. The thought of communicating his inability to make it big in the United States of America to his family back home scares him. He therefore motivates himself with thought that "Kamalu must have been too slow not to have made it in America within two years" (26). However, after about a year of living and working in America, Kaito only manages to save a paltry three hundred dollars from the odd jobs he does.

As cited earlier, John Arthur points to the fact that most African migrants embark on their journeys with the hope of fleeing destitution and poverty. They therefore hardly expect to meet destitute and poor people inside "God's own country" (198). Nonetheless, Kaito comes to the reality of the existence of homeless people in the United States of America when he comes out with Sabrina from Kamalu's place.

> Outside, trees were bare. The streets were empty except for a few homeless people huddled in corners with their bundles. Some curled up on heat venting outlets, absorbing as much warmth they could. In Nigeria most of the homeless people found shelter under bridges, or in religious houses. In Lagos though some of his friends shared stories of how they had been homeless within the first few days when they got to Lagos; they had to sleep under bridges at the mercy of thieves, armed robbers, violent mentally challenged people, scorpions and mosquitoes. It didn't remain permanent, they had said. They made new friends and discovered relatives who eventually took them in. Some found good jobs and finally moved into their own homes. (56)

The above paragraph in which the narrator deals with the issue of homeless people in the United States of America is sited right in the midst of the portrayal of serenity, beauty and comfort of life there. It appears that the siting of this paragraph helps Azuah to make the point that life in the United States of America may look plush and easy on the surface but if one looks carefully he or she may notice the destitution and misery that lie beneath. The homeless people in the United States of America live in a lonely and deserted environment. The bareness of the trees and the emptiness of the streets point to the fact that the homeless people are left to their own fate. Like

the trees, they are left at the mercy of the elements with no covering or protection. It also emphasizes the image of hopelessness of the homeless people; the weather is cold and they do not have proper shelter or clothing to protect themselves from the wintry weather. Their sleeping rough says quite a lot about living conditions of homeless people in America. Even though some of these people may be American citizens, they do not have any meaningful jobs to be able to rent an apartment of their own. The predicament of the homeless people in the United States of America appears to stay with them for a long time if not for the rest of their lives. One observes the miserable conditions of the homeless people in the United States of America to be a consequence of the solipsistic lifestyle of Western people. In essence, it is everyone for himself, God for us all.

In sharp contrast to the situation of homelessness in the United States of America is the picture the narrator paints of the experience of homeless people in Nigeria. Homeless people in Nigeria appear to be better off than those in the United States of America. First, the homeless people in Nigeria do not sleep on the streets. Unlike their American counterparts, they "find shelter under bridges, or in religious houses" (56). The impression one gets of the homeless experience in Nigeria is that it is not perpetual one. Many people manage to wriggle themselves out of the clutches of homelessness. Again, in Nigeria, people mostly become homeless when they arrive newly in a city. After sometime, they manage to settle down with friends or family who they come into contact with. The willingness of Nigerians to take in homeless people points to what Kwame Gyekye (1997) calls "communitarianism" among Africans. They take friends and extended family relatives into their houses because of the fraternity they find to exist between them. The existence of communal and social support networks among Africans means that homeless people in America have a better chance of an upward thrust economically. According to the narrator, being homeless does not stop people from becoming successful in life: "some found good jobs and finally moved

into their own homes" (56). Kaito's encounter of homeless people in America, destroys his perceptions of the all-round pleasantness of life in America. Later when Kaito returns to Nigeria, he passionately seek to debunk the notions of paradise which he held about the United States of America before travelling there. He tells his father, "Papa, that's not true. There are homeless and hungry people in America" (230). When his father suggests that the lot of the homeless in the United States of America are better than those in Nigeria, Kaito puts up a spirited defence that "it may even be better here because people have extended family members they could rely on to feed and clothe them" (230).

Again, like many African migrants who make the journey to America, Kaito comes face-to-face with the reality of gun violence there. Gun violence is a thing that Kaito knew to exist only in American movies. His experience of it leaves him shocked and broken. It looks like a dream to him. Kaito's first encounter with gun violence in the United States of America happens when he begins to work as a salesperson in Abuda's store. When "Caucasian young man of about eighteen with freckles on his cheeks walked into the store" (28), Kaito could hardly see anything amiss until he "pulled out a gun from his underwear and waved it at Kaito's face" and said, "I ain't messing with you … Now with one hand pick up that bundle of money and give it to me. Keep looking at me, with the other hand up. Any games and I will kill you!" (29, 30) Eventually, Kaito manages to bolt off with a piece of his ear blown out by the robber's bullet. However, because of his status as an irregular migrant, Kaito is neither able to contact the police nor visit the hospital for treatment. Amin simply sacks Kaito to save him from deportation and Kamalu gets him over-the-counter drugs to take care of himself.

Kaito's second experience of gun violence occurs at McDonalds, the eatery which family friend from Nigeria, Abuda, manages. Abuda offers Kaito a cut from his official work hours at

McDonalds to help him to take care of himself since life had become tough for him after he was sacked from Amin's store. An aggrieved customer comes to the McDonald branch at which Kaito worked to complain about suspected food infestation which she suggests has caused her child to be admitted in the hospital. Kaito directs her to Abuda who tries to calm the woman down but before Abuda realizes the woman had pulled out a gun and shot him. Medics and police officers are immediately called to the scene. Here Kaito is both concerned about the injury of Abuda and what his own fate shall be should it be found out that he is an irregular migrant. Kaito therefore lies to the police about his position there in order to protect himself from being arrested. Kaito's second encounter with gun violence in the United States of America shocks him to the extent that "he never imagined that he would come close to witnessing some of what he saw in American movies in real life. It was like a dream to him" (37). The incidences of gun violence he experiences in the United States of America do not look coincidental to him. He imagines that these occurrences could be the orchestration of his enemies from home who may be casting spells or juju against his progress. The reality of gun violence in the United States of America shakes and shocks African migrants who encounter it.

3.4 DISILLUSIONMENT AND DEPRESSION

Studies have established a strong link between the mental health of migrants and their settlement processes in the host country (Bhugra and Ayonrinde 2004, Ben Kuo, 2011). Several factors have been tendered as causes for the depression among migrants. Key among them is "the discrepancy between achievement and expectation" (Bhugra and Ayonrinde, 2004:14). Disillusionment of African migrants to the West often leave them depressed with life there. General symptoms of depression which Bhugra and Ayonrinde allude to, such as, "identified fatigue, loss of appetite, loss of sexual interest, weight loss and self-accusatory ideas" (13) are sometimes manifested by

African migrants. Their regret for making the journey, the absence of the fulfilment of their dreams and the risk of arrest and deportation takes a toll on them both physically and psychologically. Bhugra and Ayonrinde aptly capture the psychological impact of disillusionment on the migrant when they state that

> Mismatched aspirations and achievements can also produce stress, which can be related to the onset or genesis of depression. Expectations of the new country in terms of both personal and social gains (prestige in particular) must be matched by achievement if the individual is to function well. If achievements do not match aspirations, individuals are open to low mood, a sense of alienation and, more importantly, a sense of failure – all of which can trigger depression. It is possible that economic migrants will have heightened expectations of social mobility, which are more likely to contribute to a striving for success that might not be matched by achievement." (16)

African migrants who travel to America, for instance, do so with high personal, familial and societal expectation at the back of their minds. If for nothing at all, migration is expected to bring economic and social uplifting to the migrant himself. Therefore in the situation where the barest expectations prove hard to reach, this marks the beginning of their woes. The heaviest depressive pressure comes when the African migrant thinks of himself as a failure because he falls short of the family and societal expectations. For example, if the economic situation of the migrant makes it impossible for him or her to send remittances home he is then thought of as a failure.

In *Edible Bones* one observes a discrepancy between Kaito's aspirations and achievements. His experience of life in the United States of America turns out to be very different from the one he imagined before making his journey. This creates a heightened sense of anxiety and disappointment with himself and the whole idea of migrating to the United States of America. When he loses his legal status, realizes and experiences the complexity and difficulty of living and working in the United States of America without the right documents, Kaito slides from

disillusionment into depression. The narrator's commentary on Kaito's life in the United States of America in a year says quite a lot about the depressive symptoms that become apparent in his life.

> It took more than a year to pay Beth. Amin could only afford to pay him half of the minimum wage. Kaito moved in with Kamalu. But Beth tried to persuade him to spend some nights with her. He refused and focused on paying her all he owed her. Kaito worked all day long. He minded the store, and during slow hours he fried and replaced the chicken on the display case of the store. He also made sure he refilled the coffee pots till afternoon. He lost a lot of weight in a year and spoke very little to anybody. (28)

Back home in Africa, the general perception is that African migrants can "make a killing with just a few years in Germany, even in America" (210). However, "it took more than a year to pay Beth" an amount of one thousand two hundred dollars he owed her. When Kaito initially arrives in America, he puts up with Beth, an American lady she meets at Kamalu's apartment building. Beth takes care of Kaito until he feels he cannot stand her killing sexual appetite. But before she would let Kaito go in peace, she insists on taking one thousand two hundred dollars from him for the accrued bills of heating, food and water. The only alternative that Kaito has is for Beth to report the issue to the police. This option scares him so badly that he agrees to pay Beth all her money back without exacerbating his woes. In order to pay back Beth's money, "Kaito worked all day long" (28). However, Kaito's long and hard work becomes woefully inadequate as he is only paid "half of the minimum wage" because of his lack of legal status. The discrepancy between Kaito's wages and the efforts he puts into it takes a painful and depressing toll on him.

The narrator sums up Kaito's depression in the statement, "He lost a lot of weight in a year and spoke very little to anyone" (28). Kaito's loss of weight may be attributable to several factors; loss of appetite, lack of money to spend or a frantic attempt to save and send money home. His loss of weight is a biological manifestation of the psychological tensions that have engulfed him. The same psychological tensions also lead to personal isolation and loneliness. By this time in the

novel, Kaito lives in Kamalu's apartment. However, according to the narrator, Kaito "spoke very little to anyone." The sudden reduction in Kaito's interpersonal interactions appears to be anomalous compared to his initial relational posture when he arrives in Kamalu's apartment. When Kaito arrives newly in Kamalu's apartment, he appears spirited and active in his interaction with him. He speaks about his enthusiastic desire to do all manner of work to gain as much money as possible within the shortest possible time. However, after his disillusionment with life in America, "he spoke very little to anyone" (28). Again, Kaito's reduced interaction with others amounts to a kind of minding of his own business. After realizing that his high expectations cannot be reached as easily as he initially imagined, he becomes reclusive. Too much interaction with others in and outside his social network circle, he fears, may give him up to the police or immigration officers. Hence the need for him to mind his own business. He speaks little to Kamalu perhaps out of the shame and guilt of depending on him for shelter after living in the United States of America for a year. Kaito's deepening disillusionment leads to his deepening depression whenever he thinks about his failure. Sometimes, "he couldn't sleep; he tossed around. A panic attack gripped him" (99). At other times, "he laid in the dark and cried himself to sleep" (80) and also "sat down on the only couch in the room, rested his head on his hand, and wept like a baby" (89, 90).

3.5 DISILLUSIONMENT AND RETURN MIGRATION

Disillusionment among African migrants abroad usually puts them in two straits; return to the home country or find ways of coping with the situation in which they find themselves. The former is always considered to be last resort. It is after the migrant's supposed strategies of survival fail that he or she is faced with the unpleasant choice to return voluntarily or compulsorily. Dustmann and Weiss (2007) define return migration as "a situation where migrants return to their country of

origin by their own choice, often after a significant period abroad" (23). It must be pointed out that Dustmann and Weiss' definition of return migration fails to cover the group of migrant who are forcibly removed from the host countries and returned to their countries of origin. Most return migrations are embarked upon voluntarily. However, in many cases the governments of host countries have had cause to forcibly remove people from their countries for immigration violations such as visa overstay, engaging in profit-making when their visas do not permit them to do so. In some other cases, migrants who have had brushes with the laws of the host country are compulsorily made to return to their countries of origin after serving a jail term after their cases are brought to a logical conclusion in a court of competent jurisdiction. Such is the case of Obinze in Adichie's *Americanah*. After overstaying his tourist visa in Britain, he tries to legitimize his stay by marrying a British citizen. The marriage deal ends as a sham and Obinze is arrested, arraigned before court and ordered to be deported. Rather than file an appeal against deportation, Obinze chooses to leave the country. He tells the lawyer assigned to take up his appeal case, "I'm willing to go back to Nigeria" (279). For the Nigerian critic, Babalola Idowu-Faith Oluwafunlola (2014) the decision to reject the opportunity of an appeal "translates Obinze's return migration from a forced one to a voluntary one" (6). The position taken by Oluwafunlola appears quite untenable because Obinze's decision not to appeal his case does not amount to voluntary return migration. Rather, Obinze refuses to appeal his deportation because he thinks it will be an unnecessary prolonging of his detention Britain.

However, Kaito's decision to return to Nigeria after acquiring legal documents through his marriage to Jemina may aptly be described as voluntary return migration. The decision to return home, for most African migrants who do not see themselves to be in good standing economically, appears to be a harrowing nightmare. Return migration also brings up the question of expectation

and achievement. Disillusioned African migrants are not prepared to go home if they have not been able to achieve the wealth for which reason they set out in the first place. For Cassarino (2004), "Preparedness [for the returnee migrant] pertains not only to the willingness of migrants to return home, but also to their readiness to return. In order words, the returnee's preparedness refers to a voluntary act that must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home" (271).The general expectation is that the returnee migrant will bring considerable wealth to the host country. This is why Kaito's friends, Jamma and Mezi refuse to make any payment after ordering for ridiculous amounts of food and drinks when they go out with him (208-210). However, Kaito returns to Nigeria not meeting people's expectation of an "Americana". He does not have sufficient resources of his own to return to Nigeria, he however relies on Jemina's resources to take care of himself, friends and family. Back at home he is always compared with other Nigerians in Europe and the United States of America who return having built mansions in the city as well as in their home towns and villages. Kaito rejects any such comparisons as inappropriate since those back home have no idea the kinds of jobs these supposedly rich returnees do before getting their money. Nonetheless, people back home do not care about what an African migrant in Europe or the United States of America does to get their money. For them "work is work … Why not? As long as he does not kill to get his money" (230).

Again, compared to his friends Bola and Sammi who stayed and worked in Nigeria, Kaito appears to be "the only failure" (198). While Bola got himself a job with a bank, Sammi became a successful entrepreneur. Kaito's assessment of himself show him that he might have been better off had he stayed in his home country. This appears to be Azuah's perspective on the migration of Africans to the West. To travel to the West without a meaningful engagement there, is what Azuah

seeks to discourage in *Edible Bones*. Kaito's overstaying of his visa ends him in disillusionment and destitution. Azuah presents two categories of characters who stay back home while Kaito makes the journey to America; those who appear to be struggling to make ends meet (Mezi and Jamma), and those who become financially successful (Bola, Sammi, Chuchu, Ekwutosi and Nnaji). These two categories of characters Azuah presents show that staying back home does not mean one would become poor or affluent. However, when one analyses Kaito's situation before he left for the United States of America, it becomes safe to say that life back home might have been much better for him than the hustles he gets into in the United States of America.

3.6 STRATEGIES OF MIGRANT SURVIVAL IN THE HOST COUNTRY

The journey to the United States of America is usually embarked upon by African migrants on the premise of hope and dream that life on the other side will be better than it is in the country of origin. When reality dawns after arrival and the migrant characters get to know that they cannot make money as quickly as they initially imagined, they do not immediately give up. Their first action is not to give up and return to their original country. They device strategies of survival and coping mechanisms to go around the hindrances that they face in the host country. For instance, when Kamalu enlightens Kaito on the complexity of life in the United States of America,

> …he winced at the thought of telling his family and friends that he couldn't make it in America. They would ask him if the other Nigerians who sent cars and built mansions were more intelligent, if they had two heads and he had only one head. There must be *another way*, he thought. Kamalu must have been too slow not to have made it in America within two years. (26) [Italics mine]

Contract or scam marriage, taking up double jobs procurement of fake documents form part of what Kaito calls "another way" to achieve one's goal of getting a successful life in the United States of America in spite of the stringency of the system.

3.6.1 MARRIAGE AS A STRATEGY FOR MIGRANT SURVIVAL IN *EDIBLE BONES*

Even though April Schueths (2015) writes to lay bare the inconsistencies in US immigration policies against inter-racial couples under the laws of the United States, she cites a number of benefits that undocumented immigrants receive when they marry a US citizen or person with permanent residence in the US. She admits that:

> Certainly marriage to a citizen may provide advantages for an immigrant spouse. For instance, spouses of U.S. citizens have priority immigration status. In 2013, spouses of citizens included 25% of all new legal permanent residents. In addition, partners who receive legal permanent residence via a spouse may wait three years until they are eligible for citizenship, instead of the standard five. (811)

From the immigration-related advantages that Schueths (2015) cites above, one realizes the reason why irregular African immigrants see marriage as the golden route to immigration status improvement in the United States. For Kaito, marriage to Jemina, a US citizen, indeed, paves a way for him to be able to better his conditions. However, before getting legally married to Jemina, Kaito had failed at his attempt to enter into a contract marriage with Rosie.

When he relocates to Brownsville, Kaito makes the acquaintance of Purky who helps him to enter into an agreement with Rosie to get married. Clearly, in this marriage agreement, love is not a binding factor. The relationship is set up with individual benefits in mind; Rosie, for money involved, and Kaito, for the possibility of improving his immigration status. The terms and conditions for this mutual agreement was "that Kaito would give her a lump sum of about three thousand dollars after the wedding and give her the balance of another three thousand after the immigration interview" (127). However, things do not go according to plan as Rosie was nowhere to be found on the day of the immigration interview. It is noteworthy that Kaito's immigration

woes would have been assuaged long before meeting either Purky or Rosie had he succeeded in his earlier relationship with Sabrina. A few weeks after meeting Kaito, Sabrina rents and furnishes an apartment for him.

> Roseburg was the name of the new apartment complex Sabrina found for Kaito. It was a block of self-contained rooms – two story building. It was surrounded by withered pines and mounds of snow. When they stopped into the apartment, Sabrina took him by the hand and showed him the items she brought – utensils, microwave, cutlery and a new mattress on the floor. "This is your new home, my darling." Sabrina announced. Kaito jumped in disbelief. (57)

Nonetheless, Kaito falls out of favour with Sabrina because of the pressures of keeping pace with life in America. The debts he owes coupled with the requests for help from his family back home makes Kaito unable to give Sabrina enough attention. He refuses to make love with her because of his tiredness after working double jobs. Kaito loses Sabrina for good when he tells Sabrina of his unpreparedness to take care of his child which Sabrina carries.

Kaito's breakthrough comes when Jemina agrees to marry him while he is behind bars for overstaying his visa. Even though her initial love relationship with Kaito fails because of his inability to fulfil her extremely high sexual desires, Jemina gives him another chance. It is only on the basis of her marriage to Kaito that he gets to travel back home.

3.6.2 TAKING UP DOUBLE JOBS AS A STRATEGY FOR MIGRANT SURVIVAL IN *EDIBLE BONES*

Of all the reasons why African immigrants choose to live in a particular American city, Joseph Takougang lists "the prevailing racial climate, political tolerance toward immigrants, and employment opportunities" (193) as the most significant. The need to find employment is a matter of course because that is the expected route to prosperity. Even before Kaito settles down in

Kamalu's place, one of the first things he speaks about is finding a job to do in order to "make fat American money" (25). However, the reality is that, as a migrant on a visitor's visa, Kaito is not permitted to work under US law let alone "make fat American money." However, he agrees to work legally and be paid off the official record. In such circumstances, the migrant is mostly under-paid for his services. This pushes him work double or more jobs to be able to make more money. This is why Kaito works at Amin's store and K Fried Chicken. The narrator describes Kaito's double-job routine thus; "A few months after Kaito started working for Amin, he was about to find a second job at K Fried Chicken, mostly on the morning to afternoon shifts. Every night on weekends, he also worked for Amin" (49). The tiring routine of working double jobs takes a physical and emotional toll on Kaito's health. As the narrator notes:

> Everything seemed to be on course, particularly for the extra money and working towards a place of his own until he started noticing a tingling feeling at the back of his legs. He couldn't tell why or how it started; however, he knew that standing for long hours melting drums of fat and frying chicken or washing dishes, added pressure to the muscles in his leg. He kept ignoring the tingling until he experienced an intense muscle spasm … he nearly fell into the heating oil" (49, 50).

The quest to make it by hook or crook, and thereby, taking up double jobs nearly cost Kaito his dear life. Again, it increases his apprehension about the possibility of getting arrested and deported back home. As the narrator observes, Kaito realized later that his face was getting familiar to a lot of people. "…Those who see him at K Fried Chicken tell him they see him at Amin's store, and those who see him at Amin's store tell him they see him at Jemina's Dollar Store" (107). It proves to be an unrealistic strategy of migrant survival because its health effects are enormous and its financial benefit is nothing to write home about.

3.6.3 PROCUREMENT OF FAKE DOCUMENTS AS A STRATEGY OF MIGRANT SURVIVAL

Procurement of fake documents to live in the host country is another survival strategy which African immigrants adopt. In spite of the dire consequences that such a strategy has, immigrants like Kaito use it to be able to get a job and also to access state services such as health care. As pertains to the psychological self-preservation principle of fight or flight, irregular African migrants like Kaito look for ways of fighting to survive in the American system rather than succumb to the demand of going back home. In the case of Kaito and Abuda, they are both terrified of the idea of return without the signs and tokens of accomplishment. While Abuda "would rather live a mysterious life [*in America*] than be made a laughing stock [*back in Nigeria*] (151), Kaito finds the thought of returning terrifying. Kaito could simply not bear "the thought of telling his family and friends that he couldn't make it in America" (26). This is why he finds the thought of acquiring a fake ID appealing. It, at least, offers him the opportunity to blend in with the system. After realizing Kaito's persona non grata status for overstaying his visa, Amin, the owner of the store where he gets his first job tells him about "the Mexican quarters" (41) where he could easily acquire a fake ID. The narrator describes Kaito's encounter with the fake document producers thus:

> The Mexican quarters Amin described for him seemed desolate when he arrived … an alley full of Mexicans, Chinese, Caucasians, Indians and Arabs. A couple of men walked pass him whispering 'ID,' 'Green Card.'…He felt his pocket to make sure he still had the four thousand dollars Amin loaned him. This was in exchange for his services for one year. He truned back to the first man; he had a red bandana wrapped around his oblong head. Kaito could not tell if he was Mexican or Arab. "ID," the man repeated… "Four thousand, nothing less!" Kaito paid him half of the money, two thousand dollars. When he returned a few hours later, his green card was ready and the four names with 'Mu' Bundu'

> etched in the middle. His new name read Francis "Mu Bundu" Agu. (41, 42)

It is difficult to tell whether Kaito's inability to spot the spurious nature of his transaction with the Green Card producers is due to his desperation or naivety. This is because it does not take Kamalu so much time to identify Kaito's supposed Green Card as fake. It is as a result of possessing fake documents that Kaito's gets arrested and put behind bars. After analysing the documents Kaito gives to him, the immigration officer simply says, "Sir, you have overstayed your visa, you have a fake green card and a fake employer's ID" (140). Thus, the procurement of fake documents does nothing to help him to go around the system. In the end, the long arms of the law catches up with him.

3.7 Conclusion

Generally, all the African immigrant characters in *Edible Bones* show varying levels of disillusionment with their journey to the United States of America. The most educated of them all, Abuda, leaves by the mercies of the American social welfare system. He has not achieved as much as expected economically. His long stay in the country appears not to have paid off. Azuah's presentation of almost all her African migrant characters as people who become some sort of failures in their pursuit of the American dream reveals her agenda of using her literary work as a medium of discouraging the idea that the grass is always greener across the Atlantic. The contrasting economic experiences of Kaito, who travelled to the US, and those of Bola, Chuchu, Ekwutosi and Nnaji, who stayed on in Nigeria buttresses the point about Azuah's agenda of discouraging the over-glorified image of migration among Africans. Again, this is why Azuah portrays a vivid image of the disillusionment and survival in the host country. Through personal assessment and re-assessment Kaito comes to the realization of chasing after the mirage of an American dream.

CHAPTER FOUR

MIGRANT DISILLUSIONMEENT AND SURVIVAL IN OKEY NDIBE'S *FOREIGN GODS, INC.*

4.1 Introduction

Chika Unigwe, author of *On Black Sisters Street,* in an endorsement statement on the novel's blurb describes Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* as a "blistering exploration of the contemporary African immigrant experience." The contemporary immigrant experiences of the African characters in the United States of America Ndibe presents in his novel show the stark realities that confront migrants when their goals of migration are not achieved. The weight of failure is not merely individual; it is, in some cases, familial and even communal. This is because the African migrant's journey to America involves a careful and collective effort which is expected to yield the right dividend for himself, his family and his community at large when he arrives successfully in the host country and becomes gainfully employed. John A. Arthur (2012) and Hilary Chala Kowino (2016) both agree that most migrations are embarked upon with the hope of getting access to a better life and opportunities which hitherto are not available in the migrant's country of origin. However, for Ikechukwu Uzondu, the main character of Ndibe's novel, the hope of attaining and living the American dream becomes a constantly moving mirage. The years he spends educating himself in America does not guarantee him the opportunities he seeks. In spite of his excellent academic records in Economics from Amherst College, Ike is unable to gain a job which is suitable for his qualifications. Job-interviewer-after-interviewer refuse to pass and employ him because of challenges ranging from his "alien" status (24) to his "crappy" accent (32). This poses a major crisis for Ike as he feels the pressure of failure; failure to prove to himself, his family and friends back home that he managed to achieve his goals of becoming successful and wealthy in America. The challenge of failure places on him much mental, emotional and financial burden. However,

like a bee to a colourful flower, Ike gets attracted and constantly pursues his own version of the American dream; to get "far more money than he ever made in any two or even three years he worked as a cabdriver" (14).

This chapter explores the various contexts of migrant departures, the dimensions of disillusionment and survival of African migrant characters in *Foreign Gods, Inc.* It discusses in much detail, the processes and conditions of disillusionment and also analyses the various coping mechanisms that migrant characters in the novel adopt to survive and succeed in the host country.

4.2 Contexts of Departure

The African migrant's decision to travel out of his or her country of origin is predicated on several contexts and reasons. These contexts and reasons are at the base of the deep disillusionment they face when things go in the wrong direction for them. They also account for the reason why the African migrant puts in his or her all to survive in the host country rather than to abandon his or her dreams and return home to begin a new life.

4.2.1 Context of Family Expectations

In *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ike makes his journey to America in the context that he hopes to improve both his life and those of his family members back home. His family members have as much stake in his journey to America as himself because the success of his journey invariably translates into their success. In "Imagining a Future in 'Bush': Migration Aspirations at Times of Crisis in Anglophone Cameroon", Jill Alpes (2014) tells the story of an African migrant (called "bushfaller" by Anglophone Cameroonians) who dies at the hands of the police on a visit to his home country of Cameroon. According to Alpes, other Cameroonians express shock and concern about the

"consequences" of the returnee migrant's death to his family much more than they do for the brutal use of force by the police. This is because "a bushfaller's (African migrant's) life has more worth than that of 'normal' people. The expectations and hopes of the entire family are projected onto the family member who is in "bush" (place of travel outside Africa)" (260) [brackets mine]. Arthur (2000) points to the familial and sometimes communal dimensions and implications of African migration to the United States when he states that:

> Within the African extended family system, migration for the purpose of pursuing educational goals, especially in the United States, is considered rational behavior, an investment in the family's human capital with the expected result of increasing net family earnings. Families are likely to sponsor family members to go to destinations that will bring the maximum financial benefit. The expectations placed on the migrants by extended relatives are, thus, very high. The migratory experience is not only for the benefit of the individual migrant; it has a collective importance for the migrant's extended family as well. This increases the pressure on the migrant to succeed financially and, if possible, send money home, assist relatives with the capital to operate a small business, or sponsor younger family members to come to the United States. (22)

After Ike's journey abroad, his elder sister, Nkiru, writes him persistent e-mails reminding him of the nonfulfillment of the family's expectation of him. As the only son of his late father, Ike bears the responsibility of taking care of his mother and other members of the family. The context of family expectation becomes important in the analysis of Ike's life because it properly explains the accentuated depression and disillusionment that he encounters after he fails to achieve his goals. As the narrator reveals, "Over the last year, her e-mails came, by his rough calculation, at the rate of six or more per week. Some days, as if in the grip of malarial urgency, she sent two or three at once. Each one belaboured the same point: Mama's demand that he visits home 'as soon as possible,' 'without further ado,' 'without any further unnecessary delay,' 'in due haste'" (44). Apart from the need to visit home, Mama laments in Nkiru's e-mails about the long cessation of her money for upkeep which she refers to as "food money" (43). Ike's inability to send regular

remittances back home worries her a lot. Later when Ike travels back to Nigeria, Mama reveals to him that his failure to send her regular remittances means that "at night the stomach rumbles with hunger" (127). His failure to send remittances to his mother also turns her into an object of ridicule and humiliation in the community. Mama tells Ike, "You have left me a thing to be laughed at. Yes, Ike. I've tried to pretend to have no ear, but the ear hears things. People laugh at me. *Her son is in America,* they say, *yet she's left to chew sand for food*" (127). This context of Ike's journey to America shows that the African migrant's journey is as much an individual affair as it is a familial and sometimes communal one.

4.2.2 Context of Education in African Migrations

Another important context for understanding Ike's disillusionment and frantic attempts to survive in the host country is the context of the purpose of travel. In *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*, John A. Arthur (2000) identifies "the desire to pursue postsecondary education, to reunite with family members, to take advantage of economic opportunities, and, finally, to escape from political terror and instability" (20) as the principal reasons for which most Africans migrate to the United States of America. In *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, the main reason why the leading character, Ike travels to the United States of America is to pursue higher education. The pursuit of higher education, for him, like many other African immigrants in the Unites States of America, is expected to open doors to vast economic opportunities, thus, providing a sure way to a quick socio-economic progression in the American society. After his secondary education in his hometown of Utonki in the Eastern part of Nigeria, Ike travels to America to pursue a degree in Economics at Amherst College, Massachusetts. The degree in Economics is the thread which he hopes will pull him to the fulfilment of his migrant dreams. This,

most certainly, is Ike's main motivation to study so well. He graduates *cum laude* in Economics. Despite his dismissal of Ike's application for employment after school, the interviewer for Frisch Investments, Inc. agrees to the fact that Ike's "[academic] credentials are excellent" [emphasis mine] (32). However, the path of excellent educational prowess proves to be inadequate to help Ike to achieve his goal of prosperity in America. Ike's devotion to his African accent and his inability to adapt to the American accent becomes a major setback for his entry into a well-paid job in the American corporate world. Ike's African accent creates an identity challenge which threatens his American dreams and further deepens his disillusionment.

4.3 Accent, Identity and African Migrant Disillusionment

Language is one of the most vital contributory factors to migration success of African migrants in any host country. African migrants with no or limited language skills are neither able to get their dream jobs nor move about as easily as expected. This is why most African migrants tend to be attracted to the metropolitan centres of the former colonial powers. So, for instance, migrants from Lusophone African countries find Lisbon and other Portuguese cities as the main centres of attraction, as migrants from Francophone African countries see Paris, Lyon and other French cities as the right places to go, while migrants from Anglophone African countries see London, Liverpool, Bristol, Dublin, and other Anglophone jurisdictions of the world as the most suitable places for them to find success. This comes about due to the fact that in such destinations the language barrier gets conveniently dealt with. For a country like Germany, the issue of language is so important that it is strongly associated with citizenship. In addition to the different criteria that one has to meet, at least a B1 in German language proficiency is expected. Thus, African migrants who seek to naturalize as Germans have no other option but to demonstrate fluency in

their speaking of the German language. Closely related to the language spoken by the African migrant is the accent with which he or she speaks. Accent then becomes an important marker both for inclusion and exclusion creating an "us"/"them" divide in terms of identity in the host nation.

The identity of the African migrant in the United States, in many ways, differs from that of the African Americans who found themselves there as a result of the their ancestors' survival of the inhuman and savage experiences of the Middle Passage and the trans-Atlantic slave trade in general. Accent is one of the markers of the difference between the African migrant and the African American in the United States of America. To emphasize this dichotomy, therefore, Msia Kibona Clark (2008) refers to Africans who migrated to the United States in the late twentieth century and those who continue to do so in the twenty-first century as "African Americans of recent African descent." This group captures Africans who migrate to the United States and naturalize to become Americans. The main character of *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ike, belongs to the category of Africans who share the identity commonality of African descent with African Americans who came to the new world through slavery but differ from them in areas of accent, food and culture etc. This difference in the identity of the two groups of Africans becomes problematic as the African migrant's inability to assume an American accent and by extension, an American identity, becomes a huge challenge in the quest to achieve success. This is because the African migrant's continuous holding on to his or her African accent and culture amongst others puts him in a kind of an exclusion or a not-from-around-here zone. This 'otherness' does not help the African migrant's quest to achieve his or her American dream.

In *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ike's 'otherness', affects him both positively and negatively. The concept of "otherness" as pertains to postcolonial and cultural studies relates to the construction of "us" versus "them" identities. It pits the majority against the minority whose propriety of place is

questioned. To fit in, the minority "other" is expected to find a way of conforming to the ways of the majority. To a minimal degree, Ike's difference from all others in his class in the university works for him but when he completes school, it works maximally against his expectations of migrant success. The uniqueness of Ike's African accent earns him the attention and eventual love of Jill Goldstein, a white American classmate. This gives him a sense of pleasantness and equality in the American society:

> There was a time when the word "accent" did not bring Ike pain, only certain kind of pleasure. In his college days, before he met Penny and after their breakup, he'd scored with several women who confessed to adoring his accent. In fact, his accent was the spark for his relationship with Jill Goldstein, which lasted three semesters. They met in Professor Kevin Greene's popular Intro to Econometrics course. One day, Professor Greene had called on Ike to read a paragraph from the textbook.
>
> Jill caught up to Ike at the end of class. "I want you to know that I really, really, really *love* your accent," she said, keeping pace with his stride. (32, 33)

The uniqueness of Ike's accent is what Jill finds intriguing about him. This shows the love principle of the attraction of opposites at play. The principle buttresses the point that Jill falls in love with Ike because she finds him to be dramatically different from herself. The relationship between Jill and Ike was relatively short. Had it been a bit longer, it would have saved him the troubles he faced in acquiring citizenship through marriage. This trend of an American girl being attracted to an African classmate because of his accent and cultural difference is popular in American literature. For instance, in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha, an African American girl, falls madly in love with Asagai, a Nigerian student studying in the United States. Beneatha dumps her African American boyfriend, George Murchison, in favour of Asagai. It takes Beneatha's mother's intervention to prevent her from moving with Asagai back to Africa.

After successfully completing his degree in Economics at Amherst College, Ike seeks to find a job to be able to make the money which would enable him to live his American dreams. However, his

strong African accent and identity stands in the way. In all the interviews he attends, Ike's application for employment is rejected even though "he received his work authorization" (32) to apply for a job. It is when he applies for a job at Frisch Investments that he realizes the true reason for the rejection of his several applications to different companies:

> After just five or so minutes, the interviewer swept up a sheaf of papers on the desk that included Ike's transcripts, letters of recommendations from two of his professors, and application form.
>
> Eyes fixed on Ike, the man clasped his fingers together and leaned forward.
>
> "Your credentials are excellent, but the accent is crappy." He said the words with blaise directedness that Ike associated with the city. …He sat opposite a man telling him that if he wanted a job in the corporate world, he'd have to learn how to speak English. The man unclasped his fingers. He permitted a perverse gentleness to possess his face.
>
> "I speak English," Ike said. "I took English courses at Amherst – and made straight A's. You can look at my transcript."
>
> It is what it is. The accent isn't right. I can't hire you. (32, 33)

In spite of his stellar academic achievements; graduating *cum laude* and making "straight A's", Ike does not get employed on grounds of his "crappy" African accent. Ike retains his African accent even after four years of studying Economics at Amherst College in order to maintain his African identity because he sees America to be the land of the free, full of opportunities for all. However, he does not appear to be comfortable with certain ways and mannerisms of the American society. For instance, the narrator notes that "despite all his years in America, he'd never become comfortable with the idea of calling strangers by their given name" (6). Thus Ike's refusal to adopt the American accent and by extension a new American identity cuts him off from the great opportunities that America has to offer because he is seen as an outsider. As Su Yeong et al. (2011) observe, the refusal or inability of an immigrant to adopt the American accent enhances the "perpetual foreigner stereotype" (1). This is because as Sung (2016) notes;

> accents are powerful markers of identity in speech … individuals' accents can be related to others' perceptions about their identity … For instance, an L2 speaker's

> accent may index a particular identity (including national, racial or socioeconomic identity) for interlocutors who may then evaluate the individual on the basis of the identity associated with the accent and any stereotypes it calls up (56).

Sticking to his African accent means that Ike self-identifies as an African rather than American. This contributes to the negative assessment he gets from his job interviews. For instance, Kalin and Rayko (1978) [cited in Carlson and McHenry (2006)] observe that "applicants with 'foreign'accents (i.e. Italians, Greeks, Portuguese, West Africans and Slovaks) were rated most suitable for lower status jobs among Canadian-English speaking judges" (71) at job interviews. Again, in their study to establish the relationship between employability and accent among immigrants in the United States, Carlson and McHenry (2006) observe that intelligibility and comprehensibility of accent plays very crucial role in the employability of a job applicant. According to the study, job applicants with minimally perceived accents received higher ratings for employability while those with maximally perceived accent had lower rating for employability.

Adult immigrants and young ones alike find their alien image stemming from their use of an African accent to be problematic, depressing and discomforting. It deprives the African immigrant of his or her sense of belonging. According to Clark (2008), many second generation African immigrants are able to assume both an African identity as well as an African American one. She reveals that,

> With the lack of their parents' African accents these children often grow up with dual identities. They intimately know both communities. They were educated in the American school system, learned of the Civil Rights Movement and grew up on BET. They learned the African-American vernacular in the playground during the day and at night the unique rhythms of the language of their ancestors. (175-6)

First generation African migrants who care a lot about the loss of their children's African identity tend to teach and interact with them at home in their mother-tongues. Connection to the African American heritage helps them to blend in perfectly into the black heritage of the American society.

Hence, Ike's failure to hybridize is what stands between him and his ability or suitability to live the American dream.

The assumption of a multicultural and hybrid approach to life in the host country has been identified by Homi Bhabha as key to migrant success. In his introduction to *Locations of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) criticizes "the fixity and fetishism of identities" (1337). He praises Pepon Osorio, Latino artist, as a "great celebrant of the migrant act of survival" which he (Osorio) does through the creation of a "hybrid cultural space" in his art works (1336). Hybridity, for the African migrant, is an important tool for survival. In "Migrations and Representations: The Cinema of Griot Danni Kouyate", Daniella Ricci (2018) posits that the options of whether or not to integrate into the culture of the host country are consequential to the survival of the migrant. For Ricci:

> migrants can stay in a nostalgic, separate universe, try to assimilate into the new environment, or be open to cultural exchange. If migrants accept the challenge of complexity, they are compelled to continually "negotiate" their identity within the new sociocultural framework…producing "multidimensional thinking". Migrancy places people in a condition of belonging to many cultures, at an intersection of histories and memories (p. 69).

To "negotiate" one's identity in the host country suggests the reaching of a compromise. That is, in the host country, the migrant finds himself in a position where he or she cannot attain desired success by getting fixated with the nostalgia for his identity in the country of origin. Therefore, attachment to the former identity of the migrant has to be loosened in order to accommodate the pervading notions of identity in the new environment in the host country. The creation of an "in-between" identity is what helps the migrant characters to survive and flourish in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Taye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. For instance, Marjorie in *Homegoing*, speaks "like a white girl. White girl. White girl. White girl" (p. 269). Even though her black colleagues at school are not comfortable with Marjorie sounding "like a white girl", it appears to be her mode of

survival and blending into the American environment. In *Ghana Must Go*, the Sai children show much diversity in their choices of food, music, clothing and life partners which reflect their hybrid and multi-cultural approaches to life.

Ndibe shows the currency and relevance of adopting a hybrid and multicultural approach to life by presenting the case of an African migrant who, compared to Ike, becomes successful. Like Ike, this character is a Nigerian who is gainfully employed and socializes easily with his colleagues at work. While going about his work as a taxi cab driver, Ike encounters a diplomat, who like Ike's job interviewers, quickly notices his African accent. When the diplomat realizes that Ike is from Nigeria he quickly intimates, "one of our smartest attorneys is from there. His name escapes me, but he's smart, smart kid. Not a bit of accent … None at all" (22). A close examination of the words of the diplomat reveals that in his conceptualization of smartness, the ability to express a good accent is connected to it. It is this same line of thinking that informs the judgement of those who assess the competencies of Ike during his several job interviews. A possible remedy that Ike could have sought is to have enrolled in a private accent improvement class. However, Ike does not see anything wrong with the way he speaks English. He does not see accent to be so important so long as he gets the work done. For Ike, his ability to execute assigned tasks is clearly evident in the string of excellent passes on his transcript. Unfortunately, a good American accent is highly exalted in the eyes of American job interviewers.

Similarly, in Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu finds herself in a situation of being considered an "other" because of his African accent. To get around this challenge she tries her best to fake the American accent in other to belong. She made sure that:

> She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with "So", and the sliding response of "Oh really", but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue. If she were in a

> panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds ... (173)

Unlike Ike, Ifemelu puts in deliberate attempts to learn speak and sound American. This to a large extent, helps Ifemelu to blend in with the generality of the American population. Even though she abandons her newly-acquired accent and sticks to her African accent before her journey back to Africa, it is safe to say that Ifemelu's American accent acquisition proves to be an important coping mechanism for her.

The failure to get his dream job in the United States leaves Ike massively disillusioned. He refuses to "submit any job applications for the next six months. He settled into his cab business" (33) because it does not have any stringent accent requirements. Joseph Takougang (2003) observes this when he notes that:

> Although there were about 100,000 highly educated African professionals throughout the United States in 1999, many more are also involved in jobs where less education and often less skill may be required. They work as cab drivers, parking lot attendants, airport workers or waiters, waitresses, and cooks in restaurants. (193)

Even though driving a taxi is expected to earn Ike some money, it is a lower status and lower-paying job compared to those jobs for which his applications had been turned down. Slowly, his faith in the fairness of the American dream of equality and opportunity fades away. When his friend, Usman, tells him, "you're a talented young man. America offers great opportunities" (54), Ike's quick response is, "I used to think so, too … but now I know better" (55). For Ike, the rejection of his job application on the basis of his accent amounts to the rejection of his African identity, hence his enormous disillusionment concerning his initial expectations of life in the United States. This is why he gives Usman a mini-lecture about the lip service the world pays to the concepts of globalization, hybridity and borderlessness among others thus:

> Well, I'm here for now, not in Europe. We're supposed to be living in this new global setting – a village, many call it. In college, I took classes where the buzzwords were 'synergy,' 'hybridity', 'affinities,' 'multivalency,' 'borderlessness,' 'transnationality,' whatnot. My sister lives in Onitsha, near my village, but she has Internet access. A gallery somewhere in this city buys and sells deities from Africa and other parts of the world. Many American companies are selling stuff to people in my village. They're certainly selling stuff to me, to lots of people who speak the way I do. But I apply for a job and I'm excluded because of 'my accent,' quote, unquote. It's worse than telling me outright I'm a foreigner, I don't belong. Then academics rush in to theorize me into an exile. That's why I refuse to wear that tag. (55)

Ike's argument in the above quotation is that, since the twenty-first century world lives in an open society, a global village, it is then apt for the villagers of the globe to be allowed to move freely and benefit from the resources and opportunities that are available in any part of the village. This is akin to the principle of reciprocity which calls for a cross-sectional and mutual exploitation of one another's resources and experiences. His failure at several job interviews marks, for Ike, an exclusion of Africans from having access to the global cake of prosperity. The unfairness of this system is that while Africans like Ike are excluded from the prosperity of the United States for instance, United States' citizens and companies have unfettered access to the rich resources and opportunities that are available in Africa.

Ike's rants to Usman are in sync with Kowino's (2016) arguments about the superficiality of the theories of globalization and borderlessness in the real world in his article, "In Search of the Divide between the Local and the Global." He notes that the rupture of the lines between the local and the global is in many cases theoretical than practical. She describes the local's participation in the global as "death-bound" because of the many impediments that are placed in the path of the local while the global is given a free-had to operate. For instance, Kowino (2016) analyses the "logic of globalization" and shows that it is turned on its head. He bemoans the fact that "in the name of

free trade, the developed world's subsidized agricultural produce has pushed local production out of the market" (75). For Kowino (2016):

> our global interconnectedness would find greater meaning if the reality of our living was not overburdened by global inequality … Beyond the façade of 'we are living in a small world, with connections everywhere,' lies a huge wealth gap between the global and the local … if it is any consolation, it is not too late to turn the tide of this aporia as we seek more ethical and equal ways of crisscrossing the line between the local and the global (85).

The marginalization and the disadvantaged position of Africans in global political and economic matters affect African people and businesses adversely. Ike's frustration and negative experience reflect what it means to find oneself at the position of weakness which Kowino (2016) describes as "being at the receiving end of globalization" (73).

4.4 AMERICAN DREAM OR DEATH: STRATEGIES OF AFRICAN MIGRANT SURVIVAL IN THE HOST COUNTRY

In the post-migration stage, the disappointment of migration dreams weighs heavily on the African migrant in the host country. The inability to make it creates an unbearable stigma around the migrant when he or she returns to the country of origin. While in America, the migrant receives complaints about his or her inability to send money home as expected by his or her family and friends. When he or she eventually returns home without what is thought to be the evidences or the trophies of a good migration; nice cars, wads of notes to share and a plush house among others, family and friends conclude that he or she is a chronic failure. The stigma of failure in the eyes of family and friends back home puts the African migrant in a position of psychological difficulty and depression, hence, the decision to dig his or her heels in and do whatever it takes to survive

and live his or her American dream of prosperity and happiness. This is why, in *Foreign Gods, Inc.,* Ike only returns home once after thirteen years of living in America. While in America, he adopts several strategies of surviving and coping with his situation until he gets to the point of appreciable prosperity. He looks to marriage of convenience, gambling and committing the sacrilege of selling the emblem of an ancestral god as a pathway to achieving his American dream of prosperity and happiness.

4.4.1 Marriage as a Strategy of the African Migrant's Survival

Marriage is one of the sure coping mechanisms African migrants adopt in the United States of America. A non-United States person who gets legally married to a United States citizen gets a much better chance of attaining permanent residency and subsequently naturalizing to become a United States citizen. For the African migrant, marriage to a US citizen is usually a dream come true. This is because the attainment of United States citizenship paves the way for certain job opportunities which are precluded to aliens. In their study, "The Value of an Employment-Based Green Card", Mukhopadhyay and Oxborrow (2011) find that "for employer-sponsored immigrants' the acquisition of a green card leads to an annual wage gain of about $11,860." This explains why in *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ike does all that he can to get himself a Green Card. When he phones BayBank to follow up on his application for employment, "a female employee called back and left a terse message in his voice mail. "Sir", the woman said, "BayBank does not interview aliens unless they produce evidence of authorization to work in the US" (25). A US citizenship, in this case, would have enhanced Ike's chances of getting to work with BayBank to earn a salary that aligns with his qualifications.

The failure of Ike's relationships with two American citizens, Jill Goldstein and Penny Rose, shows that he did not properly understand the importance of marriage to the quick acquisition of

a green card when he was a student at Amherst College. Jill Goldstein gets attracted to Ike because of his accent and African identity. However, Ike only manages to stay with her for three semesters. Had Ike fully comprehended the crucial role of marriage to an American citizen plays in the quest to acquire a green card, he would have perhaps taken his chances with the American girls with whom he had brief amorous relationships more seriously.

Ike's relationship with Penny Rose had a much greater prospect than all that he ever got into while in the university. As the narrator notes, Penny was "the woman he loved – and who loved him" (24). However, Ike grows cold towards her after sneak-peeking into a letter Penny's father sends to his daughter in which he expresses his vehement disapproval of his daughter's relationship with Ike. Penny's father would rather that his daughter went in for "a nice fellow African American man" (25). It is the sense of rejection that Ike feels in this letter that put him off completely. No matter what assurances Penny offered, Ike's love for her could not be resuscitated. By the time Ike realises his error, it is certainly too late to get back to Penny; "Months later, unable to coax him out of a cold whining resentment, Penny moved on. She began to date a Senegalese engineering student named Diallo Dieng. One day, two years after they all graduated, Ike received a letter from Jonathan Falla with news that Penny and Diallo had married" (25). Having, with the benefit of hindsight, foolishly given away an easy pathway to the attainment of a green card and later, citizenship, Ike goes through much trouble before acquiring one.

Like most African migrants, Ike first seeks to acquire a green card through contract marriage. He engages the services of a Puerto Rican broker at a whopping fee of three thousand five hundred dollars. As it is in the cases of most African migrants to the US, such green card marriage brokers tend to be dubious and deceptive. In the case of Ike, the Puerto Rican broker, Ricardo Otis, promises to bring Yesenia Diaz to pose as Ike's green card bride. Again, like most African

migrants, Ike has high hopes of things working out perfectly. He imagines himself possessing his green card after a short time. However, on the expected date for the exchange of marriage vows, Ike's green card bride vanishes into thin air.

> Ike and Yesenia were to meet at the office for the justice of the peace to exchange marital vows. They held a rehearsal, Yesenia's face bearing a sneer through it all. Came the appointed date, and Yesenia was nowhere in sight. Ricardo showed up alone with the news that Yesenia's grandmother had taken ill in Puerto Rico, and the would-be bride had travelled to be at the matriarch's bedside. "She coming back soon," Ricardo assured, "and then the wedding, it gonna happen.
>
> For the next three months, there was no Yesenia. Yet at the end of each month Ricardo appeared at Ike's door and demanded the due instalment of two hundred dollars. (26)

When Ike decides that he has had it to the neck dealing with Ricardo Otis and refuses to part with any more money, he gets a call from Yesenia who refuses to turn up because Ike decides to stop scraping his wallet for Ricardo. This situation leaves Ike disillusioned and depressed. He "sulked for a few weeks. Then he gathered himself up and relocated to Philadelphia where he continued to work as a cabdriver" (27). From Philadelphia, Ike relocates to other American cities still carrying "along that stubborn dream for a green card. [*because*] The card was the open sesame to a corporate job befitting his qualification. " (27).

The last relationship Ike gets into in his desperation to acquire a green card is with Bernita Gorbea, an African American New Yorker who agrees to marry him. However, from the onset their relationship appears to be doomed to fail. "At their first meeting, Ike sensed that Bernita was trouble on two legs. … Marriage to Bernita struck him as a huge risk. All told, a risk worth taking. With a green card in his possession, he would be in line for good corporate job" (28, 31). When Ike takes the risk and marries Bernita, he finds marriage to her to be simply unbearable. She flirts with Cadilla, a store owner in Bernita's neighbourhood, and in turn accuses Ike of infidelity whenever he fails to have sex with her as satisfactorily as she expects. He accuses Ike of making

his "… Zulu dick be running around, looking for some white ho" (34). Sex, for Bernita, is all that is important in her marriage to Ike. As the narrator notes, sex is what drove her into marriage with Ike; "Two distinct, different dreams had driven them into marriage. Ike was desperate to obtain a green card. It seemed that Bernita wanted to acquire her own in-house sex service" (24). Ike's lot in Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.* is similar to that of Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*. When she meets Curt, a rich white American, while working as a babysitter in Kimberly's house, she takes the opportunity to strike an acquaintance which develops into a marriage relationship. Throughout her relationship with Curt, one thing is sure. She is not in the relationship for love but for an opportunity to hasten her process of acquiring residency papers. Ifemelu's marriage to Curt can be described as one of convenience because sometimes even while "naked beside him, she found herself thinking of Obinze" (195). Ifemelu and Curt's marriage ends in divorce, but not before Ifemelu gets her residency papers.

Again, Bernita's extravagant spending throws Ike's migration dreams off-balance. Even though he gains permanent residency in the United States after marrying Bernita, he is unable to send money back home to her mother and sister because "she demanded more and more money for her shopping sprees" (33). When Usman tells Ike about other African cabdrivers who "never complain about lack of cash" but "roll in lots of cash", Ike retorts that "they didn't marry Queen Bee" (56). Ike's eventual divorce with Bernita also known as Queen Bee, leaves him with both excitement and pain. His excitement stems from the fact that he feels free from the stress and financial strain that Queen Bee puts him through throughout their marriage. However, it is painful for Ike to realise that "the judge in his divorce case allowed Queen Bee to cart away his little savings and any of his possessions she fancied" leaving him virtually bankrupt. This is why the suggestion to travel back

to Africa and steal the statue of his revered ancestral deity for lots of dollars appeals to him much strongly.

4.4.2 Gambling as a Strategy for African Migrant Survival

Another significant strategy that the African migrant explores in a bid to fulfil his or her migration dreams of prosperity and happiness as reflected in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is gambling. The idea of gambling becomes more acceptable and appealing when the reality of the toughness of achieving pre-migration dreams gradually dawns on the African migrant. When he or she realizes that an African migrant, especially one without permanent residence documents, has to do multiple jobs merely to survive; pay bills and keep body and soul together, they become gravely disappointed. However, with the huge expectation from family and friends back home, the failure of migration dreams is not a viable option. The prospect of acquiring massive wealth through gambling appears to the African migrant as the pathway to the fulfilment of the migrant dreams which have so far proven elusive.

In a study of gambling among racial and ethnic minority groups in the US, Alegria et al (2009) delineates the three standard categories of gamblers; problem gamblers, pathological gamblers and disordered gamblers. They explain these categories of gamblers thus;

> Distinct from pathological gambling, "problem gambling" refers to a condition in which individuals meet three or four DSM-IV criteria, rather than five or more required for the formal diagnosis of pathological gambling. ... "Disordered gambling" is used to describe the combination of problem and pathological gambling. All individuals meeting 3 or more DSM-IV criteria for the diagnosis of pathological gambling are considered as suffering from disordered gambling. Disordered gambling is associated with substantial interpersonal, financial and legal difficulties as well as increased rates of substance abuse, mood and anxiety disorders, and suicidality (133).

Ike's kind of gambling falls under the category of problem gambling. This is because he conforms to three of the criteria on the DSM-IV checklist, namely; "chasing one's losses or winnings,

gambling to escape problems or relieve depressed mood, relies on others to provide money to remedy desperate financial situation due to gambling" (149). Ike is not a one-off gambler. He stakes and loses but continues to chase his losses with the hope that he would hit a massive jackpot to be able to live his dreams. However, as the narrator notes, "… gambling brought him nothing but sorrow" (43). Again, gambling, for Ike, appears to be a way of escape from the depression that the burdens of having to deal with Bernita and his family back home bring him. Lastly, Ike borrows money from Usman and Big Ed to make his journey back to Nigeria because he spends a lot of money on gambling.

It is the exponential financial outcomes that gambling promises that makes Ike engage in it. He hopes that by it, he can take care of Queen Bee and send remittances back home as well. As the narrator observes, "A year after arriving in the city, he'd taken to gambling. He had wanted quick cash to replenish some of the money Queen Bee lavished on expensive clothes and jewellery. And he had wanted extra cash to send to his mother and sister, to keep them quiet. But gambling brought him nothing but sorrow" (43). The prospect of getting quick-cash is what keeps Ike gambling in spite of failing to win as handsomely he expects to. The fact that Ike continues to gamble even though it drains the meagre amount of money left from Bernita's insatiable spending, puts him in the category of what gambling experts call a problem gambler. He "forays into gambling, a venture driven by dreams of great fortunes that always ended in huge losses" (21). In a conversation with one of his passengers, Ike reveals that he is into gambling because of the large financial burdens on him, referring to the need to take care of his mother back home. He particularly blames his mother and the need to remit her for his present predicament. However, Ike's passenger gives him a stern rebuke for blaming his mother for his woes. He tells Ike, "you gamble, you gamble. To

blame your mother … To blame your mother for your choice is foolish" (21). Like a fleeting mirage, gambling fails to help Ike to achieve the substance of migration dreams.

4.4.3 Violating Metaphysical and Cultural Values in Pursuit of the American Dream.

The last of the survival tactics Ike adopts in the host country is that he hatches and executes a plan to return home ostensibly to see his family with the covert intention to steal the wood carving of the ancestral god of the riverine town of Utonki, Ngene, and bring it for sale to Gruels, the owner of Foreign Gods, Inc. Ike goes to this extreme because he believes that by selling Ngene's wood carving, he can make "far more money than he ever made in any two or even three years he worked as a cabdriver, first in Springfield, Massachusetts, then Philadelphia, Atlanta, Baltimore, and now New York" (14). However, stealing and selling the wood carving of Ngene amount to the violation of the metaphysical and cultural value of the ancient artefact. It is sacrilege, which in African traditional thought, is seen as unthinkable.

Sacredness and sacrilege are integral to most belief systems in the world. In traditional African thought, the concepts of sacredness and sacrilege are associated with metaphysical objects, people and spaces. These objects and spaces receive reverence and paranormal value from their association with forces and beings that are thought of as supernatural. Emmanuel Edeh (1985) posits particularly concerning Igbo metaphysical thought that "for all beings in the material universe, existence is a dual and interrelated phenomenon" (17). The duality of existence suggests that certain objects have both visible and invisible essences. Osuakwu, the chief priest of Ngene, explains the duality of the wood carving thus,

> He pointed at the statue. "That mad man *(Pastor Uka)* thinks Ngene is this carving from a tree. Ngene is a mystery deeper than what any man can understand. That

> mystery lives in the river itself that coils around Utonki. It is a river that provided our ancestors with both life and protection. That river is still doing its work today, even though the oyibo has come and turned today into yesterday, making a lion into a lamb. Can any man carry off a river in a basket? …My son it is not good to have dealings with a god that is not visible. The spirit of Ngene is in the river, but its body is here, in this statue. Why did our ancestors insist that each god must have its wooden body in a shrine? "Italics mine" (199, 200).

On one line of reasoning, according to Osuakwu, Ngene is not the statue in the shrine. Rather, Ngene is the "mystery" or spirit that lives in the river. However, on a different trajectory of thought, Ngene is the statue in his shrine. In African traditional belief and thought, both lines of thoughts are valid. Thus the statue in the shrine is inhabited by the same "mystery" or spirit that dwells in the river. It is because of this mystery of the duality of being that totems, carvings, stools, and the generality of objects found in the shrine of the gods are considered sacred. Therefore, the pressure on Ike to live his American dream must have been really extreme for Ike to deliberately consider returning to Utonki to commit such an act of violation. When one analyses Ike's reasoning concerning the relevance of Ngene to the twenty-first century Igbo, one realizes that he has no regard for its sacredness. He argues, disdainfully, that:

> Ngene was now no more than a retired god, a slumberous deity, in limbo. Its decline began on that day when the white man burst upon Utonki's warriors and showed his superior hand. … In an age when gods must travel or die, he, Ike, would become the instrument to refuel Ngene. It had fallen to him to show the world to Ngene, stuck too long in Utonki, and Ngene to the world. He pictured a party that would be thrown on the marvellous lawns of some swanky home to celebrate the acquisition of Ngene. It would be an extraordinary affair, the biggest debut party, graced by all the big collectors. They'd cast killing eyes of envy at the lucky new owner of Ngene, an African god of war (169).

While these go on, Ike imagines that he would have taken his fat cheque for the sale. He considers Ngene to be no longer useful to Utonki because there are no more wars to be fought for Ngene to lead its people, hence, his decision to sell it and use the proceeds to fight the war of survival in the West.

The advent of European colonialism and Christianity in Africa, like materialism in the modern era, has also brought into question, long-held views of the value of religious and cultural objects, spaces and artefacts. Okoli's killing of the royal python in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, also reflects the violation of the sacredness of objects and spaces. Even though he does it out of foolish religious fervour, like Ike's stealing of Ngene, it amounts to the violation of the spiritual and cultural essence of the African conception of sacredness. Ike's stealing of the wood carving for sale to Gruels at Foreign Gods Inc. shows the high sense of materialism that is associated with African migrations to the host country. The fear of failure in the eyes of family and friends tends to put material gain at the zenith of Ike's expectations, hence, the cultural and metaphysical implications of his actions are completely set aside. For instance, Ike views his returning to steal the wood carving of Ngene in commercial terms. Before leaving the United States for Africa, he tells Big Ed that he is getting into "buying and selling" (49). Later when Usman warns him not to get into drugs, he replies, "my deal is clean" (56). Ike's use of "deal" and "buying and selling" hints at the fact that he has little or no regard for commodification of ancestral objects that have immense metaphysical and cultural value.

Ike's commoditized approach to the wood carving of Ngene differs sharply from how patriotic-minded Africans would relate to such revered materials. In *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, Wole Soyinka (2007) puts forth an intriguing narrative about the extreme extents he and a few friends of his go in their failed attempt to recover the original bronze head of the Ori Olokun, the Yoruba goddess of the sea. Since its exhumation was made by the German archaeologist, Leo Frobenius in 1912, the whereabouts of the bronze head of the Ori Olokun had never been sighted in Nigeria. It was simply thought to have been lost. Therefore, when Soyinka and his friends get wind of the information that the head is tucked away somewhere in the private collection of an art collector in

Brazil, they make every effort to retrieve it. After series of deceptive manoeuvres aimed at retrieving the bronze head, Soyinka and his friends steal it without delay and head for Cheikh Anta Diop's lab in Senegal where they discover that the head they stole from the Brazilian art collector in Brazil is nothing but a master copy of the original bronze head of the Ori Olokun which they later find is locked up in a British museum. While Soyinka and his friends seek to restore the ancestral relic of the Ori Olokun to its home in Nigeria, Ike seeks to repatriate that of Ngene for financial gain.

Ike appears to be at his wits end when he accepts the idea of selling Ngene's wood carving to Gruels. This is why, perhaps, all his sense of morality erodes to the point that he accepts the suggestion of getting Ngene's emblem for sale in the United States to be able to live his America dream:

> He flipped the pages to the catalog's last section, marked "Heavenly Inventory." The lowest price in the section was $171,455; the highest $1.13 million. He studied the images of the deities in that section. Carved from soot-black wood, it had two fused figures, one female, the other male. The figures backed each other. The female was big breasted and boasted a swollen belly. The male figure held a hoe in one hand, a gun in the other, its grotesque phallus extending all the way to its feet. They shared the same androgynous head, turned neither left nor right but forward. A pair of deep-set eyes seemed to return Ike's stare. It was listed for $325,630. Ike read the short italicized description: *A god of the crossroads, originally from Papua New Guinea*
>
> "Wait until they see Ngene," he said under his breath, a flush of excitement washing over him. Surely, a legendary god of war would command a higher price than a two-faced crossroads idler." (3, 4)

In his estimations, Ike expects to make nothing less than $325,630 from his sale of Ngene. This, in his view, is substantial enough for him to risk the journey of theft to Africa and back. With such a good amount in hand, he hopes to be able to afford the luxuries and pleasures that America affords.

Nonetheless, the hope of a good life after selling Ngene ends in total jeopardy and further disillusionment. The palpable error in all of Ike's engagements with Foreign Gods Inc. is that he never officially reaches an agreed amount for which Ngene would be sold. After the emotionally and financially gruelling experience of stealing a god from its ancestral place and manoeuvring through corrupt Nigerian immigration and customs officials to get it into the United States, Ike could not believe the scanty offer that he gets from Foreign Gods Inc. Gruels tells him that he would either "…pay little for this (Ngene). Or nothing" because African gods are no longer profitable" (318). He points Ike to his inventory of African gods and tells him:

> That's a Wolof god of fertility. It's been marked down by eighty percent – and it's still here. This one, a Bambara water goddess. Six years ago, it would have fetched half a million – easy. Now take a look at the price tag a mere eight thousand five, yet no buyers." He touched a toothy statue. "This is a Fanti god. Been on the shelf for four years. … That's a Ligbi god of revellers – a deity I personally like. But guess what? Nobody's looking at it." This is from Togo, an Ewe guardian of magic … I wish they did as well as they used to. I've offered huge discounts, but collectors simply aren't interested. African deities are no longer in vogue" (320-21)

Gruels does not only deal with objects of antiquity, he specializes in the sale of strange and exotic gods; "the art of god collection" (69). However, as he recounts to Ike, people's tastes for African gods appear to have gone down drastically. Therefore Ike's expectation of receiving three hundred and fifty thousand dollars ($350,000) for Ngene turns out to be an extremely high estimation. Gruels only pays one thousand five hundred dollars, which could barely pay for Ike's trip to Nigeria and back. This pushes Ike into further disillusionment because he has bills and debts to pay.

Later when Ike begins to hallucinate and appears to be haunted by apparitions of Ngene, his debts and bills become the least of his problems. From the time Ngene arrives in Ike's flat to the time it gets sold to Foreign Gods Inc., Ike seems to have been under a spell cast by Ngene. These spells

appear to be the punishment that Ngene metes out to Ike for his desecration of its shrine. At least the mystical occurrences in Ike's flat and also at Foreign Gods Inc. shows that Ngene has not lost its powers after all. Gruels asks Ike whether he knew that at the gallery of Foreign Gods Inc. "Ngene farted storms from its rump?" He tells him, "we sprayed perfume on it every day – and it still stank up the store" (330). The narrator describes Ike's hallucinatory and haunted moments after the sale of Ngene thus:

> ONCE AGAIN, THE FLOOD came. This time, there was no heraldry. One moment, he was safe; he luxuriated in a bed of plumes. The next instant, he was immersed in a flood. It churned and tugged and tumbled. Underneath the rage, it was airless. Afraid of asphyxiation, he lifted his head for air. Bobbing along the surface was the statue of Ngene. It gazed at him, seemed amused. Disconcerted, he ducked under. The stream's howl deafened him. The maddening siren belched from a vortex.
>
> He clambered awake, his pounding heart reverberating in his ears. … His eyes remained drowsy from interrupted sleep. Yet, the moment he shut his eyes the image of Ngene appeared. Reclining against the wall at the very spot where he'd left it for several days, it looked grotesquely emaciated. There was a terrifying indeterminacy about its visage. It seemed to be weeping and laughing all at once. (327)

In African traditional thought and belief system, the cause of Ike's troubles is not far-fetched. It is believed that a god whose artefact is stolen or desecrated in the manner Ike does Ngene, descends with vengeance. Perpetrators of such acts are haunted by the god, sometimes leading to death or madness. In the case of Ike, he realises Ngene's hand in what is happening to him. However, his efforts to recover Ngene's wood carving yields no results as "a Japanese guy snatched it up" (329) at the gallery of Foreign Gods Inc. only two days after it was put up for sale. Even though Gruels offers an extra thousand dollars to Ike, it is not able to assuage his present financial troubles and what he envisages to be the impending wrath of Ngene. For Gruels, the sale of Ngene is no big deal; it is his usual business to deal in strange and exotic deities and sacred objects so he does not properly comprehend it when Ike says, "it must return to its shrine – or trouble continues"

(329). Thus, after selling of the statue of Ngene, Ike fully realises that modernity does not delete the African's consciousness of the physical manifestation of the violation of the sacred essences of metaphysical and cosmic spaces and objects. This indicates that the vagaries of the African culture stick with African people, migration to the United States notwithstanding.

4.5 Conclusion

As discussed in the paragraphs above, Okey Ndibe in *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, sets out to show that African migration to the West does not conform to the pre-migration notions of easy wealth and fulfilment. Life for the African migrant in the West is subject to the constraints of acculturation and stringent documentations which requires the adoption of coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms become especially crucial when return migration is not an option one considers, particularly when one lacks the financial and material proofs of a successful migration. Ndibe shows that return migration is not always the normal option African migrants consider when they move to the West. In the case of Ike, return migration only becomes an option so long as it fits into his strategy of surviving and living his American dreams. Unfortunately for him, his plan of stealing the antique statue of the river god, Ngene, proves to be both physically and metaphysically consequential. Ndibe ends the novel rather inconclusively, thus, leaving readers to conjecture about the fate of Ike.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The first four chapters of this thesis have sought to offer significant understanding of the literary presentation of the African immigrant experience in the United States of America in Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* and Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* They have dealt with the important issues of; the African immigrants' pre-migration expectations, the realities in the host country, acculturation and documentation challenges, unemployment and family expectation of remittances and, additionally, the African immigrants' strategies of survival in the host country. This chapter summarizes the work done in the preceding chapters, ties up the issues raised so far and makes recommendations for avenues for further studies which this thesis has either opened up or could not fully analyze.

5.2 SUMMARY

Through their presentation of the lives of African migrant characters such as Abuda, Kamalu, Kaito and Ike, Azuah and Ndibe deflate the perception of migration to the West as the low-hanging fruit. Both writers particularly focus on what I call failed migration narratives. They show that the perceived prosperity of the West is, as Musonye (2007) puts it, "glass, not diamond". This categorizes *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones* as not only belonging to African migration literature but also belonging to the "literature of social awareness". This kind of literature and the awareness it expose falls between the latitude of "Utopia" and "Dystopia". Thus, the texts exposes the parts of the migration story which are usually edited out by returnee African migrants in order not to subtract from their show-off of glamour and prosperity in their local space. *Foreign Gods,*

Inc. and *Edible Bones* share significant points of thematic and other literary notes of convergence and divergence.

5.2.1 Convergences in the Presentation of African Migrant Disillusionment and Survival in Both Novels

One of the initial observations of convergence one notices in Okey Ndibe *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and Unoma Azuah's *Edible Bones* is in the area of characterization. Both writers create protagonists who are filled with bright dreams; dreams of a good and prosperous life in the United States of America. While in the host country, they both reject, outright, the idea of return migration in the sense of coming back to live permanently in Nigeria. The protagonists, Kaitochukwu (Kaito for short) and Ikechukwu (Ike for short) are both Igbos from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. They do not envisage any prospect of goodness and prosperity in their future should they continue to live in Nigeria. Ike hopes to study in America and after that earn a well-paying job there to be able to live his American dream. Kaito also has the same goal of achieving the American dream of wealth and happiness by joining the "underground economy" doing whatever jobs he lays his hands on. A close study of the lives of Ike and Kaito reveal a pattern: they both cannot work because of their lack of required documentation and recognition. However, they dig their heels in and adopt both legal and illegal ways to get around the American immigration system. They later attain the required documentation but their dreams of wealth and happiness fail to materialize.

The circumstances of the lives of these protagonists stand contrary to the fabled success that many actual and fictional "been-tos" tell. In Ghanaian parlance, one who migrates to the West and returns is referred to as "Burger" or "Borga", a term which is derived from the migrations to Germany in the 1970s and 1980s (Nieswand 2014). The term "Burger" (corrupted to "Borga") gained currency in the 80s in reference to Ghanaian, mainly Akan, migrants in Germany who were mainly

concentrated in the German city of Hamburg. On their return, they became standard bearers through their fanciful (pop-culture) dressing, show-off of wealth and exaggerated mannerisms. They often sold their cars, fridges and other material acquisitions before sneaking back to Germany when the going became tough for them, a phenomenon which spawned the derogatory idiom "Borga aye mmre" which translates into "Borga is broke". Over time, "Borga" became a generic term not necessarily for migrants in Germany but for Europe in general (Italy, UK, Netherlands etc.). America, at the time, was not a main Ghanaian migrant destination, and the term was not applied to those returning from America, then. Today, the term is used in reference to migration to all kinds of destinations, hence the new coinages such as; "Dubai Borga", "Libyan Borga" and "South African Borga" amongst others. Like the stories of returnee migrants that Kaito's friends are accustomed to in *Edible Bones*, the stories that these "burgers" tell of life in the host country are cast in over-glorified light.

This exaggeration of life in America is what Ike Oguine presents in his 2000 novel, *A Squatter's Tale*. Obi's uncle, Happiness, on his return to Nigeria after spending several years in the United States of America, tells over-bloated stories about the goodies that America holds. However, when Obi travels to America after some years, he realizes the stark difference between the life Uncle Happiness presents to people back home and the reality of things in America. However, the exaggerated stories of success in America tickles the fancies of many would-be migrants who wish they could exchange places with the returnee African migrant. Through the life stories of the two protagonists, both Azuah and Ndibe shed vital light on the failures, stresses and the unpleasant aspects of African migrant life in the host country.

Another point of commonality in Azuah's and Ndibe's characterization is the dogged survival instincts their characters possess and the coping mechanisms they employ. Once Kaito and Ike

arrive in the United States, they do not countenance the idea of going back home, without having achieved their migrant dreams of substantial wealth. This is why it takes Ike thirteen (13) years before making his first journey back to the country of origin. Similarly, for his three-month visa, Kaito ends up spending several years in America before making his first return journey to his country of origin. To acquire the legal documentation that allows them to work in America, both characters adopt transactional "Green Card marriage". While Ike pays three thousand five hundred dollars ($3,500) to get Yesenia to pose as his bride, Kaito pays three thousand dollars to get Rosie to pose as his wife-to-be. Like the case of Obinze in Adichie's *Americanah*, both marriages prove to be what they really are; a sham. This means that both characters lose the opportunity of getting legal documentation, hence, a stalling of the achievement of their migrant dreams of prosperity and a good life in the United States. It is important to note that Kaito and Ike improve their immigration status only after they get legally married to Jemina and Queen Bee, respectively.

The writers' representation of African American women in both novels shows that their relationship with African men is usually problematic. In both *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones*, African American women are depicted as sex-addicts with whom African migrant men do not stand a chance in getting a working marriage. In spite of the fact that the protagonists of both novels get rescued by African American women who agree to marry them – Ike by Bernita Gorbea, Kaito by Jemina – their marriages are doomed to fail right from the beginning because of disagreements over sex. As in some literary representations of African and African American marriages, Ike's and Kaito's are plagued with cultural clashes, misunderstanding and inadequate syncing of each other's personal interests and ambitions in spite of the historic connections that exist between Africans and African Americans. Commenting on African and African American marriages in "Crossing Cultures in Marriage: Implications for Counseling African

American/African Couples", Beth A. Durodoye and Angela D. Coker (2008) posit that "contrasting values exist between the two groups due to their divergent histories. As a result of this cultural divide, African Americans may neither identify with nor understand the experiences of Africans, and vice versa" (28). The marriage between Ato, a Ghanaian returnee and his African American wife, Eulalie, in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is a particular case in point. In the area of sexual relationship, Kaito and Ike both face cultural and practical challenges. While Jemina would like Kaito to use his tongue to stimulate sexual excitement and pleasure in her during sex, Bernita wants to have almost daily bouts of long-lasting penile intercourse. However, these Africans, with the enormous pressure on them to work so hard to remit family and friends back home, lack both the strength and excitement for the excessive—almost vampire—sexual demands of their African American pseudo-wives. In these circumstances, Ike and Kaito find themselves reduced to commoditized sexual objects. In the specific case of Kaito, he finds oral sex to be contrary to his African traditional thought on what is acceptable or otherwise to be done during sex. It takes both his desperate situation and Abuda's advice for him to capitulate to Jemina's demands. In the end, the marriages of Ike and Kaito, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones* land in jeopardy.

Again, in terms of narratology, Azuah and Ndibe's rich literary skills are demonstrated through their masterful employment of analepsis, parallel narration/juxtaposition/simultaneity and the zero focalizer amongst others in the presentation of the diegesis of both novels. First of all, the chronological order of time in both novels is not linear. The time order in the narrated universe of the selected texts is punctuated by several incidents of analepsis. The several examples of analepsis in the selected texts provide essential background information which helps the reader to be able to connect the dots to understand the present happenings in the texts. For instance, as a way of

presenting Ngene as, indeed, a powerful ancient riverine god, the zero focalizer spends the larger part of the tenth chapter of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* narrating the showdown between the revered Igbo god and Reverend Stanton, the firebrand missionary.

> *Reverend Walter Stanton appeared in Utonki on a day the sun had cast its evil eye on the world, leaving every living thing in a state of stupor, groaning. He came with a retinue of soldiers whose guns spoke from two mouths at once, two missionary underlings the people of Utonki described as his shadows, and an interpreter whose skin was as black as the blackest person in Utonki.*
>
> *The spectacle of the strange visitors drew the elders and people of Utonki to the square where the community celebrated its festivities. Then, speaking through his interpreter, Reverend Stanton announced that he had come to bring salvation to a people in darkness. (97)*

The above extract constitutes both an analepsis and a "descriptive pause." This is because, the narrator, at this point, pauses the story time to accommodate the long narrative extoling the past accomplishments of Ngene. It is important to note that the above analepses provide essential insight into the cultural and spiritual significance of the god whose revered artifact Ike travels all the way to Utonki to steal. Again, the extract identifies the religious space as a place of contest between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Paradoxically, Ngene manages to overpower Reverend Stanton, but fails to prevent Kaito from stealing the symbolic wood-carving.

In *Edible Bones*, events such as Abuda's loss of his wife and children and Kaito's recollection of his breakup with both Sabrina and Mende are told analeptically. In the particular case of Abuda, the analepsis reveals his regrets about migration. As the zero focalizer reveals:

> He told Kaito about how he set off as a married young man of about twenty eight. He left his young wife and son at Enugu, and set off on a scholarship at Cambridge. After acquiring a degree in Sociology, the lust for knowledge made him travel all over Europe for diplomas and more degrees. … One more degree, he kept saying to them. Then he jetted off to America after teaching for a year and half at the University of Onitsha. He got more degrees from America and then a PhD in Behavioral

> Sciences. One more degree and his wife remarried, one more degree and his son joined the Nigerian army and was killed. One more degree, and he was left with nothing but a long wall of certificates. Until April came along. (71, 72)

Apart from revealing Abuda's regrets about migration, the above extract also shows Abuda's lack of proper discretion. Things have not always been hard for him; he has taught in different universities and, as revealed later, he had even risen to become the Dean of Social Sciences. At the high points of his career, Abuda ought to have strongly considered getting back home to settle down. However, he stays on in America until the idea of going back home becomes, for him, anathema. The idea of returning home terrifies Abuda because as Kaito imagines, his family "… would consider him an outcast, 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).

Moreover, certain events in the novels are told in a parallel or juxtaposing manner. They offer double perspective on a similar or same matter. Even though many of these narrative simultaneity are analeptical, they offer simultaneous view of the events as they happen in both migrant character's country of origin and the country of sojourn. For instance, when Kaito gets shocked by the existence of homeless people in the United States of America, the narrator juxtaposes the experience of homeless people in Africa with those in the United States of America.

> Outside, trees were bare. The streets were empty except for a few homeless people huddled in corners with their bundles. Some curled up on heat venting outlets, absorbing as much warmth they could. In Nigeria most of the homeless people found shelter under bridges, or in religious houses. In Lagos though some of his friends shared stories of how they had been homeless within the first few days of when they got to Lagos; they had to sleep under bridges at the mercy of thieves, armed robbers, violent mentally challenged people, scorpions and mosquitoes. It didn't remain permanent, they had said. (56)

In the above extract, one observes Kaito's bubble of misconception of life in America get burst by reality. The homeless people in Lagos appear to be far better off than those in America. This is largely due to the social support networks upon which the African society is built. Unlike the case of America, where being homeless could be a permanent predicament, new arrivals in Lagos may only wear the homeless tag for a short time but "it didn't remain permanent" (46). They got taken in by friends and members of their extended family. Additionally, in *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ike's fear of rainstorms in Nigeria is juxtaposed with his experience of a heavy downpour in the United States (16-22). These storms usually make him experience seizures which lead to his falling unconscious for a period of time. Back in Nigeria, his storm-time seizures were interpreted as having a metaphysical connotation. For Ike's grandmother, his experience of seizures during rainstorms means "Ngene has favored you … You'll find out once you're old enough to understand. The same thing happened to your uncle, Osuakwu (the Chief Priest). Be patient" (17). Thus, his seizures are seen as an early sign of being chosen by Ngene for the priesthood. While in the United States, Ike experiences these storm-related seizures a few times. However, here, all attempts are made to understand his condition from a medical perspective. "After each episode, he awoke in a white room filled with bright lights and to questions about illicit drug use" (17). While Ike's rainstorm seizures are interpreted as being associated with Ngene's call, in the United States they are thought of as possible consequences of illicit drug use.

Again, Azuah and Ndibe's adoption of the traditional omniscient narration, a narrative form which Gerard Genette (1983) calls "zero focalization", forms an important point of convergence in *Edible Bones* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.* This is most appropriate for a narrative that seeks to lay bare the traumas, frustrations, depressions and occasional joys that attend the lives of the African migrant characters in the two novels. In his article, "The Licensed Trespasser: The Omniscient Narrator in

Middlemarch", Eugene Goodheart (1999) argues that the employment of the omniscient narrator is more appropriate than the use of the first person narrator in the writing of novels because in the world of fiction, "characters tend to be opaque to one another. They may even be opaque to themselves. The same self-interest that prevents them from knowing others may prevent or protect them from knowing themselves" (557). The demonstration of an unfettered access to the lives of the characters in the texts is important because the challenges African migrant characters face and their reactions to them are, first of all, mentally processed. The omniscient narrator therefore becomes the most appropriate narrative technique to adopt in the presentation of the mental and physical sufferings of the migrant characters in the selected texts:

> Suddenly an ache flared up on the right side of his head. With one thumb he pressed hard at the spot where the pain was sharpest. It hurt to read the e-mails. He didn't reply because couldn't say a thing that would make sense to them. How could he explain that the "food money" he once sent each month had dried up because a woman named Queen Bee, whom he had married in order to get something called a green card, had developed in an ever-insatiable appetite for shopping? And how to explain his gambling to them? (43)

The voice of the omniscient narrator in the above extract from *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, for instance, captures the mental struggles of Ike. It is this unique ability of mental intrusion which makes the adoption of the omniscient narrator a more appropriate point of view for telling migrant experiences. Similarly, Azuah's use of the omniscient narrator is apt because it offers a more comprehensive and authoritative perspective on the migrant experience of Kaito and the other African characters in the novel. It offers the reader an objective view of both the pre-and-post migration stages of Kaito's life. For instance, the omniscient narrator captures the dichotomy between the African migrant's perception of life in the United States before making the journey and the reality of things on arrival.

Shortly after arriving in the United States, Kaito expresses his haste to get a job and start making money:

> "But Kaito's response was, "Man, I can't wait to settle in with you and begin to make fat American money." It was at that point that Kamalu inquired about the type of visa he had. It was a visitor visa – only for six weeks. … Kamalu laughed at him and schooled him on the laws of social security numbers, employment and the hounds called immigration officers. Kaito could feel the sudden sweat on his body. He was full of questions. Each response from Kamalu made him confused. … Fraught with nervousness, Kaito felt on the verge of panic attack. … He winced at the thought of telling his family and friends that he couldn't make it in America. They would ask him if the other Nigerians who sent cars and built mansions were more intelligent, if they had two heads and he had only one head. There must be another way, he thought. Kamalu must have been too slow not to have made it in America within two years. (26)

In the above extract, one observes that it is the omniscience of the narrator which helps highlight, not only the physical challenges and frustrations of the African migrant characters in the novel, but also what happens in the psychological recesses of their migration experience. Before making the journey to America, Kaito, like many African migrants, has the view that making money in America is a thing one started immediately after arriving there. This is why the reality of the stringent documentation requirements leaves them, first, disappointed, and later, more frantic in their attempt to survive no matter what. The choice of narrator, in this case, helps Azuah to send out the message of restraint of the over-bloated expectations of would-be African migrants.

Additionally, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones* are both intriguingly open-ended. In *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, readers are left to draw their own conclusions concerning what the fate of Ike is likely to be. The novel ends with Ike in a vain attempt to recover the statue of Ngene from Gruels. Even though Gruels offers him an extra one thousand dollars ($1,000) for Ngene, Ike is left totally devastated and in a limbo. He hallucinates about the apparitions of Ngene in his room even though it is evidently sold out to Foreign Gods Inc. The open-endedness of the plot lays bare the idea of

the uncertainties that go with the migration experience in the host country. The last paragraph of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* reads:

> "I want Ngene back," Ike said. A clump of maggots toppled from the edge of a stripped chicken bone. He gasped. "I don't want the – "He swallowed the rest of his words, startled by the sound of voices outside his door, followed by four sharp knocks. The phone clicked and the phone died in his hand" (330).

This last paragraph highlights the fact that the migration troubles of Ike are nowhere near gone in spite of his possession of a Green Card and check for the sale of Ngene. Amidst his hallucinations, the knocks on the door could be coming from just anyone; the managers of the apartment where he lives, A and M Rental Management, or any of the other people he owes monies. Therefore, the open-endedness of the novel leaves readers to form their own opinions about the vicissitudes of life in the host country.

Just as it happens to Ndibe's protagonist, Kaito's life in *Edible Bones* ends in a kind of psychological torture. After longing to migrate to America for so long, eventually getting there and suffering a great deal, Kaito returns to Nigeria only to discover the "stench" of his "inner being" through an encounter with a mad man. This unusual encounter with the mad man leads to Kaito's decision not return with Jemina to America anymore. By the end of the novel, readers find that Jemina is pregnant for Kaito and also that she has plans to have "two homes here and in the US" (251). However, Kaito is not in any way enthused about returning with Jemina to the US to, as he puts it, "continue living this lie that everybody wants me to live" (251). Like *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, *Edible Bones* ends on the note of uncertainties for the protagonist. Will he be able to endure the post-migration life he envisages for himself back in his country of origin in spite of the many challenges that the country faces? Or will he make a quick turn and follow Jemina back to the US?

In spite of the convergences in the selected texts for this study, one observes divergences in certain key areas of Azuah and Ndibe's presentation of the frustrations African migrants face in the United States of America and the coping mechanisms they adopt.

5.2.2 Divergences in the Presentation of African Migrant Disillusionment and Survival in Both Novels

One of the key divergences one observes in Unoma Azuah's and Okey Ndibe's presentation of the African migration experience in their novels has to do with return migration. The concept of return migration assumes that migration is not a one-way ticket experience. It postulates that those who leave their country of origin to any host country would like to return, permanently or temporarily, as this is the case for most migrants. For instance, in "Transnationalism among African immigrants in North America: The Case of Ghanaians in Canada," Thomas Y. Owusu (2003) finds that Ghanaian migrants invest in home ownership in Ghana because of the expectation of future and permanent return migration. In the selected texts of this study, all the main characters make the return journey to their country of origin after living in the United States for some years. However, the dynamics of each person's journey back home is dependent on a different premise.

For Kaito, the journey back to Nigeria is initially set to be a temporary one. His principal intention for coming back to Nigeria is to introduce his newfound love, Jemina, to his family and friends and then return to the United States of America to work and acquire much wealth, especially now that he has his residency papers in place. Nonetheless, everything changes when he finds his eureka moment in a mystical encounter with a mad man in Lagos. Strangely, the mad man repeatedly asks Kaito to "purge, purge, purge, purge" his "rotten entrails" and the "stench" of his "inner being" (250). Even though the mad man's address to him sounds awkward, Kaito does not fail to comprehend what he says. He interprets the "stench" the mad man talks of to refer to his insatiable

desire for material wealth through migration and the wrong things it leads him to do. He therefore apologizes to Jemina for "using" her and decides to change his temporary return migration into a permanent one. Kaito's return migration leads to the discovery of the fact of the possibility of living a successful life in the country of origin.

In Ike's case in *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, return migration is a strategy for survival in the United States. This means that before making the journey back to Nigeria, Ike is well-aware that returning to Nigeria is never meant to be a permanent endeavour. Ike does not return to Nigeria because of the incessant e-mails his sister, Nkiru, writes to him. Rather, declaring his visitation of his mother and family as his reason for returning to Nigeria offers him the right decoy to the fulfilment of his main aim of going back to Utonki; that is, to steal the ancient statue of the god, Ngene, for sale in the United States of America. The huge amount Ike expects to be paid is what he hopes will offer him the financial muscle to live his American dream. Instead of offering him the solution to his shattered life in the United States, the spoils of his return migration leads to the deepening his miseries and frustrations.

Another difference one notes in the presentation of the African migration experience in the selected novels is the variations in the migrant characters' strategies of survival. In terms of resorting to the use of a paid Green Card bride to get permanent residency papers and later actually marrying an African American wife to achieve the same goal, Ike and Kaito are the same. This notwithstanding, using fake papers and gambling, by Kaito and Ike, respectively, marks out their different approaches to their experience of migrant disillusionment. This also points to Kaito's background as an irregular migrant and that of Ike as regular migrant.

After over-staying his visitor's visa, Kaito becomes persona non grata in the United States. He therefore takes Amin's advice for him to "shed his real name and take on another name" (40). This

only becomes possible after the fake Green Card producers have taken "…half of the money, two thousand dollars. When he returned a few hours later, his Green Card was read and the four names with 'Mu Bundu' etched in the middle. His new name read, Francis "Mu Bundu" Agu" (42). To assure Kaito of the possibility of using a new name, Amin tells him that he can always tell the police, when questioned, that "those are part of your names. As an African you have a right to multiple names. You can always claim an AKA" (40). Kaito spends his meagre savings on the fake ID only to be schooled later on by Kamalu on its uselessness. On the day of his arrest for over-staying his visa, his fake ID does not help him in anyway.

On the other hand, Ike makes no attempts to get fake ID in order to circumvent the American immigration system. This perhaps is because he had permit for legal stay in the country and so did not need to pretend to be another person. However, with the pressures from Bernita and his family back home, Ike sees an opportunity in gambling to earn huge amounts of money to be able to take care of them and also live his America dreams. Unfortunately, like Kaito's resort to using a fake Green Card ID to survive and live his dreams in America, Ike's strategy to gamble his way into wealth, becomes unsuccessful as "gambling brought him nothing but sorrow" (43). It is worth mentioning, that the divergences one notices in the approaches by Azuah and Ndibe points to the complex nature of the African migration experience in the United States and other host countries where African people sojourn.

5.3 Conclusion

First of all, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* and *Edible Bones* fit the description of what Njoku and Goin (2017) refer to as "literature of social awareness." This is because Ndibe and Azuah, respectively, push towards the achievement of a social cause: to create an awareness of the realities of the African migrant lives in the United States and the Western countries in general. Like Achebe, they

fundamentally use their creative enterprise as an "opportunity for education." Having travelled from Nigeria to the United States themselves, they are both aware of the misconceptions about migration and the realities of life in the host country. Ndibe first went to the United States in 1988 to be the pioneer editor of Chinua Achebe's *African Commentary* journal. He therefore has a first-hand experience of the African migrant life in the U.S. In the case of Azuah, she first went to the United States in 2001 to pursue a Master's degree in English at the Cleveland State University and later an MFA from the Virginia Commonwealth University. It is my view that the immigrant backgrounds of Azuah and Ndibe gives them both the impetus and experiential advantage to talk about the failed migrations among African in the United States.

It is additionally worthy of note that the migrant lives Azuah and Ndibe present in *Edible Bones* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, respectively, differ sharply from those of "Afropolitan" characters presented in novels such as Taye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The characters in Afropolitan novels are, characteristically, highly educated, live affluent lives and have experiences of different major cities in the world. As Binyavanga Wainaina notes, they live like a "kind of internationalized people." They see themselves as citizens of the world. As Dabiri (2013) observes, Afropolitanism cannot be viewed as a mainstream representation of the African diasporic experience as it shows the "lifestyle of the privileged few and seems to measure African Progress by the extent to which Africans can reproduce Western lifestyle." For instance, unlike the Sai children in *Ghana Must Go*, Kaito and Ike in *Edible Bones* and *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, respectively, have a very hard time surviving in the host country. They face several dilemmas and disillusionments. Unlike Afropolitan characters who feel at home anywhere in the world, the migrant characters in the selected texts of this study find the thought of going back home to be torturous and unbearable. This is why they apply all means, legal and illegal, to survive and stay

on in the United States of America hoping that one day, they would be able to strike gold and properly return to their country of origin with proofs of a successful migration; that is, cars, money, mansions etc.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This researcher makes the following recommendations for further studies:

- This present study analyzed the failed migration narrative of Africans in the United States. A study that focuses on success stories of African migrants to the West would be a fertile ground for research.
- A study that focuses largely on the literary presentation of the disillusionments and survival strategies of returnee migrants in the country of origin would complement studies on return migration in African migration literature.
- The two texts used for this study were authored by Nigerians and, therefore, part of Anglophone African migration literature. I would therefore recommend studies that focus on (or compare) Francophone African migration literature, e.g., Diome's In the Belly of the Atlantic, given that France as a colonial power has always given its colonies the idea that they have been assimilated into the French socio-cultural system, yet the African migration narrative in metropolitan France does not support that.

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