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Cynicism: The Migrants' Narratives and Contemporary Nigerian Novelists

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Abstract. This paper examines the pervasive theme of cynicism in the narratives of Nigerian migrants as represented in contemporary Nigerian novels. Through an analysis of works by writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Chika Unigwe and Helon Habila, the study identifies cynicism as a recurring lens used to portray the migrant experience. These authors often present migration as a fruitless endeavour, marked by disillusionment, failure and despair. Cynicism manifests in their depiction of migrants' struggle with unemployment, alienation, identity loss and fractured relationships. The narratives suggest that migrants face challenges both in their home countries and in the Diaspora, ultimately reinforcing a sense of futility. Using psychoanalytic theory, the paper argues that this cynicism reflects the authors' own frustrations and ambivalence about their diasporic experiences, which they project onto their characters. Furthermore, the study critiques the reductive representation of migrants as perpetual failures, questioning why contemporary Nigerian novelists neglect success stories of the diaspora. The paper calls for a broader critique of this narrative approach to understand its implication and explore alternative representations of the migrant experience.

Keywords: Cynicism, Diaspora, Contemporary, Migrants, Nigerian

1. Introduction

One of the foremost encounters between Africa and the western nations manifests in a wave of migration that has swept across the African continent and the Nigerian nation is no exception. Among the positive results of this migration is the creation of a new crop of writers with residence in the diaspora or who have migrated and returned. Both groups are thus armed with firsthand experience of the lives of the migrants in the diaspora. These experiences are documented in novels that tell the diaspora stories as part of the African experience in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Among the current diaspora writers are Sefi Atta, Chika Unigwe, Chimamanda Adichie, Helon Habila, Akwueke Emezi and others who are not of less importance. In all the stories of these writers, there is one outstanding fact; cynicism permeates all the experiences of the migrants these stories project. This is what the paper unravels. The paper argues that the cynicism associated with the stories of migrants is a deliberate approach used by the writers to project the life of the migrant in the diaspora as a failure. This emanates from the frustration and disillusionment of the writers' ambivalent lives in the diaspora.

In one of his works on cynicism, Samantha Vice (2011) observes that "there are very few analyses of cynicism to be in the literature, my account will be a necessarily rough first attempt" (p. 169). When Vice made this statement in 2011, he may have not foreseen that the issue of cynicism in literature will continue to be an elusive topic to deal with. Since then, there have been very few critical works on literature, and especially on African literature dealing with cynicism. Vice's observation of the "very few analyses of cynicism in the literature" may not be unconnected with the need to tread on familiar terrains by critics as the issue of cynicism is mostly divisive in its elucidation. Most times, cynicism is associated with negativity of the human personality. Thus Andersson (1996) says that cynicism is "an attitude both general and specific, characterized by frustration, hopelessness and disillusionment and contempt, mistrust towards a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution" (p. 11). The implication of Andersson's definition is that if a writer is a cynic, the writer can transfer his disappointment, hopelessness and frustration into the lives of the characters. For his part, Foucault argues that cynicism is concerned with "the requirement of an extremely distinctive form of

life—with very characteristic, well-defined rules, conditions, or modes—is strongly connected to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence" (p.165). In whatever description cynicism is depicted, there is no doubt of the negativity that is associated with it.

Blanca Grama (2013) argues that cynicism is 104haracterized by "a number of negative factors such as apathy, resignation, alienation, hopelessness, lack of trust in others, suspicion, delusion or weak performance, interpersonal conflicts, absenteeism, burnout" (p. 109). Cynicism, therefore, becomes a "form of self-defence … a way to cope with enigmatic or disappointing events (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997). In summary, cynicism has to do with a blunt acceptance that all human actions are self-motivated; that man will do away with the standard once the measuring line conflicts with the self-interest. This is of concern to the critic who may be conscious of the misinterpretation that may be attached to his work once cynicism is involved. This view is shared by Bernard Shaw that "the power of accurate observation is commonly called cynicism by those who don't have it" (Schreier, 2009, p. 187). This may have accounted for the few critical works on cynicism in African literature so as to avoid misinterpretation based on misgivings and wrong motives of both authors and readers.

2. Cynicism and the Migrants' Narrative

In the development of narratives about humans, writers portray the experiences of men and women as they grapple with the vicissitudes of life and the environment. As the representation of the authors' view of life and at the same time, will elicit the readers view of life and the judgment whether this view of life is portrayed realistically or not, a work of art, especially narratives of people, become a double-edged link that mirrors both the views of the writer and those of the audience. This implies that the attitude of the writer is passed on to the reader in the work and at the same time, the attitude of the reader is embedded in their interpretation of the same work. This can be conflicting or mutual. In this vein, proffering an acceptable definition of cynicism that encompasses all shades of opinion becomes an obstacle. More so, as cynicism is a psychological response to peoples' attitudes and situations, an ideal definition is elusive. But the thrust of the paper is reflected in Vice's (2011) definition that:

cynicism is a stance of disengagement, of distrust, contempt and/or skepticism (to differing degrees) adopted towards humans, their institutions and values; and adopted as a response to a belief that humans are motivated only by self-interest, or more generally, that human beings are of little worth (p. 172).

It is the issues of "disengagement", "distrust" and "skepticism" which are considered as negative that have been the bane of the depth of critical works on cynicism in African literature. This is a gap that this paper fills. The theory of psychoanalysis is employed to unravel the prevalent cynicism in migrants' narratives in contemporary Nigerian novels. The stories of migrants in Atta, Unigwe, Adichie and Habila novels provide the required illustrations that will enable the paper account for the current cynicism among contemporary Nigerian novelists in their depiction of the migrants' diaspora experience.

Migration is a topical issue in the criticism of literature as several critical works on the subject have shown (Nakash, Nagar, Shoshani, Zubida & Harper, 2012; Unuajohwofia & Babogha, 2021; Akung & Sunday, 2021). Our reading of the novels on the experiences of the migrants by the selected writers confirms only one outcome - the futility of the struggle of the migrant in the diaspora. The reason for the negative portrayal of the African migrant struggles for accomplishment in the diaspora, a narrative that is devoid of positive outcomes, is the cynicism on the part of the contemporary Nigerian diaspora novelists. In order to express the writer's attitude towards the migrant that generates the cynicism associated with these works, first, it is necessary to organise this paper to follow a trend that makes the argument of the display of cynicism towards the clearer and objective. This is to avoid falling into the despondency of the cynic as we dwell on the cynical representation of the migrants' struggle for accomplishment in the diaspora. More so, as the writers are also migrants themselves, it becomes pertinent to sieve their motivations and self-interest from the general interest of the migrant. This is to enable this paper to be detached from self-opinion arising from conflicting interest and dwell primarily on the argument that the cynicism in the narratives of these writers is borne out their frustration with their migrant experience and not necessarily a generalised picture of the diaspora lives of migrants.

The cynicism associated with the migrants' narratives manifests early in the narratives of these writers. The activation of the would-be migrant psychological make-up for the journey to the diaspora is fraught with discrepancies that prepare the migrant for failure abroad. There is the motif of falsehood in the activities that shape the migrant psyche for life in the diaspora. As the migrants navigate the fluctuations in the situation of their home countries, the migrant is

exposed to the lie that the condition of the home country is averse to their ability to fulfill their dreams in life. One way the would-be migrant is conditioned to this fact is through the portrayal of education as incapable of uplifting the individual. This argument is elucidated through the high rate of unemployment and underemployment in the home country. For instance, in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street,* the stress on unemployment as path for frustration of the would-be migrant is reflected in the representation of two characters in the novel - Chisom and her boyfriend before she travelled abroad, Peter. The narration below captures the urge that propels Chisom to migrate.

> The days after graduation were filled with easy laughter and application letters, plans and a list of things to do (the list always preceded by Once Chisom gets a job, or once I get a job) … she was never even invited to an interview. Diamond Bank. First Bank. Standard Bank. And then smaller ones. And then the one's that many people seemed never to have heard of. Lokpanta National Bank. Is this a bank? … Even in their obscurity they had no place for her. No envelopes came addressed to her, offering her a job in a bank considerably humbler than the banks she had eyed while at school, and in which less intelligent classmates with better connections worked. (pp.21-22)

The issue of cynicism in this respect has to do with the fact that unemployment and underemployment are challenges that are not limited to the home country; they are universal issues. In justifying this fact, there is need to relate the experience of Ifemelu, the protagonist of Adichie's *Americanah* in the diaspora. According to the narrator,

> AND THEN Elema's dog ate her bacon. She had heated up a slice of bacon on a paper towel, put it on the table and turned to open the fridge. The dog swallowed the bacon and the paper towel. She stared at the empty space where her bacon had been, and then she stared at the dog, its expression smug, and all the frustration of her life boiled up in her head. A dog eating her bacon, a dog eating her bacon while she was jobless. (p.251)

The import of this quote is to connect the argument that the issue of unemployment and underemployment which unequivocally translate to poverty is universal. But in the migrant narratives in contemporary Nigerian novels, this issue is packaged to portray the home country as bereft of employment opportunities while the diaspora is a land flowing with employment and wealth. It is this packaging that pricks the desire of the would-be migrant to long for the diaspora as the final solution to a barren life in the home country. This is what made Portia, a character in Habila's *Travellers,* to ask, after the death of her brother in the diaspora, that "what drove him, what did he seek, so far away from where he was born, why so restless …". The answer is found in what she refers to "as a fever, a burning raging fever from which we all seek relief" (p. 157).

The lies that surround the would-be migrant's life not end in the packaging of the diaspora as a place of final solution to the challenging life in the home country. As the mess media projects the diaspora as utopian, so also do the contemporary diasporic Nigerian novelists depict the diaspora as a difficult place to relocate to. These writers become cynical when they reduce the would-be migrant characters in their work to a level where they become unfit to travel to the western world. Several stories of the would-be migrants in these novels portray the characters as stereotypical people suffering from extreme poverty or persecution and therefore are not qualified to get visas to foreign countries. The only way they can leave their home country to the western world is to be made to reflect the narrative of home country as a place where the people are still in the Hobbesian world of brutes and beast where success is elusive. This is the case with the presentation of the educational system in the home country.

There is this narrative about a three hundred level girl in one Nigerian university documented in Adichie's *Americanah* who "gave a tearful, excited testimony in church" that "even if I have to start from the beginning in America, at least I know when I will graduate…" (p.98). Paradoxically, in the same novel, Aunty Uju who lives in the diaspora and is a sister to Ifemelu, the protagonist of the novel, is subjected to depressing exams as she grapples with her academic work. In the diaspora, Aunty Uju complains that "I've never failed exam in my life …I'm tired. I am so tired. I thought by now things would be better for me and Dike…" (p.109). This implies that the notion that academic achievements are easy to obtain in the diaspora is a fallacy. It is part of the cynical packaging of the diaspora as a utopia for the would-be migrant. As part of being used by the novelists in their migrant narratives, this fallacy becomes one of the lures that prepares the migrant for failure in the diaspora.

Still, the lies that form the personality that the would-be migrant takes abroad are further compounded with the switch of identity from the original identity of the would-be migrant to an assumed identity that is configured to pave an easy access for the migrant on the journey to the diaspora or in the integration. In cynically representing this episode in the story of the migrant in contemporary Nigerian novels, the diaspora story writers presented the identity switch

phenomenon in three ways. There is the situation where migrants are portrayed as consciously switching their identities. This is the case with Sisi Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.* Her birth name is Chisom but on the eve of her travel abroad, she decides to obliterate that name with the suffering associated with it and take a new name to herald the bliss that has been packaged as the diaspora. In the words of the narrator, Chisom "had already decided to change her name, to adopt a name that she would wear in her new life. Sisi. Sister in Shona". According to Chisom, "she would rename herself Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence, at least for a while. And once she hit it big she would reincarnate again as Chisom" (p. 44). The migrant has cynically been changed to a chameleon.

The second level in the game of switch of identity has to do with the change of the identity of the migrant by other people. This switch in identity is illustrated with the story of Joyce in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.* On the eve of her travel to the diaspora, Joyce's name is switched from Alek to Joyce. The ensuing deliberations between Dele, the travel agent or trafficker as the case may be, and Polycarp, Joyce's boyfriend highlights the cynical motive for the switch in identity. According to the narrator, Dele and Polycarp agree that "the name has to go. Alek. Sounds too much like Alex. Man's name…give am woman name. Fine name for fine gal like her". In all the conversations, Alek, the would-be migrant, does not argue. So when she is renamed Joyce, "she did not say a word. she did not even ask Polycarp why" (p. 232). In Adichie's *Americanah,* this level of identity switch is also observable. Obinze has been trying to travel abroad after unsuccessfully getting a job after graduation. Obinze is only able to travel abroad when his mother added his name in her application for Visa as her assistant research. This enables him to get a six-month visa to the United Kingdom.

The cynicism associated with the switch in identity does not ends in events that herald the actual movement of the migrant abroad but they continue even when the migrant is already in the diaspora. This is the third and last level of identity switch that programmes the migrant to a life of lies and ambivalence in the diaspora. This level is illustrated with a case in Adichie's *Americanah* where Ifemelu is advised to switch identities in order to survive the harsh situation of the diaspora. In this vein Aunty Uju alludes to similar scenario when she says that "I'm not joking. Amara's cousin came last year and she doesn't have her papers yet, so she has been working with Amara's ID." Then Aunty Uju advises Ifemelu to "just make sure you always remember your new name" (pp.120-121). On a more cynical note, there is an elaborate case of identity switch noticed in the story of Sisi mentioned earlier in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.* In order to create a blackmail situation and a stranglehold on her trafficked migrant, Sisi's Madam tells her to narrate the story below as part of her identity:

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

Talk about seeing corpses of your dead family. About stepping on corpses as you made your way out of the house. Tell them you couldn't trust your neighbours - most of them were pro-Taylor and would have killed you themselves if they had caught you … Remember, you are Mandingo. You have no passport. You escaped Liberia with only your head and the clothes on your back. A white man took pity on you and helped you escape. He saw you outside a church begging for money. He helped you got to Ivory Coast and gave you a letter for a friend of his who worked on a ship … this friend hid you. You survived for two weeks on what food you could get from the rubbish. (p. 121)

This long excerpt has to be reproduced to detail the extent to which pressure is being exerted on the migrant. As lies cannot be steadfast when subjected to scrutiny, sooner or later, it crumbles and the migrant is exposed to failure.

3. Cynicism, Failure and the hopelessness of the Migrant

In the cynical narration of the migrant story, there is the projection of the motif of futility in the migrants struggle in the novels of the diaspora experience. In the contemporary Nigerian diaspora narratives, the migrant is portrayed as a failure. In whatever human endeavour or dreams that the migrant pursues in the diaspora, the end result is always negative. In the first instance, there is the issue of education. Some of the migrant who leave the shores of their home countries to the diaspora went there to pursue higher education. The failure in the pursuit of higher education manifests in the story of Mark who left Malawi to Germany to study. Mark, formerly known as Mary Chinomba, is a Malawian girl who is "a preacher's daughter who

loved to dress in drag, who loved to perform male roles onstage, whom wasn't interested in the nice boys nudged in her direction by her parents" (p. 67). In this description of Mary or Mark, she can be termed a cross-dresser. Though this is against her parent's wish for her, she is later awarded a scholarship to study in Germany. In the home country, a person who is able to get a scholarship to study in Europe is exceptionally diligent and "the scholarship to Germany must have been the perfect solution for everyone involved, a godsend, literally" (p. 67). But this cannot be said of Mary Chinomba. The irony is that once she gets to Europe, Mary becomes a drop-out and losses both her scholarship and her visa to stay in Germany. From then on, Mary becomes an illegal immigrant in the diaspora. She has failed in her endeavour to improve her educational status.

There is also the case of the unnamed protagonist in Habila's *Travellers*. He travelled to The United States of America to study for his doctor of philosophy. In the argument that the migrant is programmed by the novelist for failure in the diaspora, the contrast between the protagonist and his girlfriend Gina, from the United States, will help to elaborate this argument. Gina and the protagonist have been in the same university studying for their PhD programme. But as the protagonist would later say, "she had graduated, I hadn't". In trying to provide the reason for his failure to graduate, the protagonist says that "it was my fear of commitment" (p.11) that made him to fail in the dream that propelled him to the diaspora. The failure of these migrants is another pointer to the fact that is is very difficult to see a successful migrant in the narratives of contemporary Nigerian diaspora novelists. Even when some of the migrants who successfully completed their education and also get jobs in the diaspora, these migrants are also not contented. They continue to struggle with feelings of discrimination, loneliness and depression. Thus, Deola, the protagonist of Atta's *A Bit of Difference*, surmises the argument of this paper that the contemporary Nigerian diaspora novelist are cynical in their narratives of the migrants' story when she says that "every Nigerian she knows abroad is to some degree broken" (53).

The failure of the migrant to achieve success in their endeavours in the diaspora also extends to the area of forging lasting relationships. In the narratives of these migrants as represented in the novels of the Nigerian diaspora, the migrants are used to the African communal tradition which is practiced in Nigeria. The African communal tradition dictates that everyone lives in a tight community of people relating together in almost about everything. This tradition of communal living is described by an unnamed migrant in Unigwe's *Better Never than Late.* Her mother has visited her in Belgium. As she watched her mother prepares food in the kitchen, through the use of the flashback technique, she reminisced that,

> Back in Nsukka, she would have been chatting with the neighbours. As a teenager who liked to spend time alone, I remembered thinking that the only time my mother was ever alone was when she was in the bathroom. She sought company. If nobody came to visit, she went and visited them … When I asked her about it, she said that the world was made to be enjoyed in company. (p. 122)

This is the tradition the migrant is used to in the home culture. But when the migrant leaves the shores of the African continent, he or she is introduced to the individualism of the diaspora.

In her home in Belgium, she is lonely without any family members or friends. It is this state of loneliness that necessitated the invitation of her mother to spend some time with her. In the first few weeks of her arrival, the mother and her daughter are cheerful and happy. This migrant who has hitherto been moody and depressed experienced a period of joy and cheerfulness when she is in the company of her mother. She states that "now in Belgium, I did not seek the company of fellow Africans or of my colleagues outside of work. No friend would have filled the empty space I wanted my mother to occupy. My home was incomplete without her. It had always been two of us" (p.116). But according to the anonymous migrant, "my mother laughter lasted exactly two months … and then, just as it had showered upon my house, the laughter dried up" (p. 123). The mother starts to experience same feeling of depression felt by the daughter before her arrival. The anonymous migrant observes that "my mother looked sad, and her sadness permeated the house so that it seemed as if it, too, was in mourning" The impact of this on the migrant is that "the sadness wound itself around my ankles, slowing my usual quick strides" (p. 123). The migrant has no option than to sit "on my computer and booked her a ticket home" (p. 124).

The joy felt by the migrant in the time her mother spent with her points to the fact that migrants lives can be successful and they can be happy when there is a wholesome relationship with loved ones. But the novelist decides to complicate the life of this anonymous migrant when the mother who is the source of the rediscovered happiness of the migrant is rendered depressed and made to return home. The joy of the migrant is cut short and this unnamed migrant is

made to return to a hopeless situation that will be worse than the one she experienced before the coming of her mother. The question is why would the novelist relocate the mother to raise the emotional hopes of the migrant and then remove the mother from the scene? It is part of the cynicism of the contemporary Nigerian diaspora novelist to pit the migrant characters in their narratives with a fate that is tragic in nature. The more these characters struggle to make their lives worthwhile, the more they sink deeper into the mire of frustration and abyss of depression. Even in their struggle to forge a lasting relationship with fellow migrants, the result is always failure. This is the case with Gbolahan and his wife Ego, who are migrants in Belgium.

The story of Gbolahan is narrated in Unigwe's *Better Never than Late.* Gbolahan has relocated from Nigeria to play professional football in Belgium. His girlfriend then, Ego, agreed to migrate with him even when she has a bright prospect in her home country as a first-class graduate of Chemical Engineering. She has argued that "you, us, our marriage is my priority. What sort of wife would I be if didn't support you? Or left you for Belgian women?" (p. 90) Later, Gbolahan had a knee injury which ruled him out from playing football. He starts working in a factory and continues to support his family to the best of his ability. At this stage Ego begins to experience a feeling of discontentment. This period is marked by her complaints against everything ranging from "the cashier at C&A … who followed her around in the store, complained about the policemen who came into the call centre …complained about stores closing on Sundays". At the same time, she argues that "in London, stores are open everyday" (p. 92). After securing a job as a teacher in London, Ego leaves her husband and child to stay in the United Kingdom. The incremental events that lead to the separation of Gbolahan and Ego are deliberately set in motion by the novelist to increase the agony of Gbolahan. Gbolahan feels betrayed by his wife as he says that:

now, when she visited us or when Bola and I drove to London to see her, she dressed like someone out of a magazine. Red lipstick and high heeled shoes, skirts with slits and colourful sweaters. And always, she smelt of perfume. Bola and I looked out of place in her flat. Like we were puzzle pieces which no longer fit. When she talked of Ofsted and GCSE's and A*, I switched off. I didn't want to hear her. There were times I wondered if I was not being childish but a still voice always reminded me that Ego broke us first. We should have been enough for her. (p. 93)

The relocation of Ego to Belgium becomes a factor that destabilise the life of Gbolahan in the diaspora. Therefore, instead of contributing to the joy of Gbolahan, Ego becomes a weapon in the hand of the novelist to frustrate Gbolahan into a life of agony and pains.

The argument of the paper that the cynicism of the novelist is responsible for the failure of the migrant in all areas of human endeavours including building wholesome relationships also finds evidence in the life of Karim, a Somalian migrant in Habila's *Travellers.* The contemporary Nigerian diaspora novelist are so cynical in their narratives of the migrants' story to the scale that when the life of migrants who have suffered untold hardships is getting to a point where success is envisaged, suddenly, tragedy will strike out of the blues and the migrant is left in a condition worse than he or she has ever experienced. Karim has a singular dream: that of keeping his family together. So, when a warlord wants to snatch his underage daughter away in a forced marriage, Karim leaves his home country for the diaspora. He passed through so many challenges in order to keep the family together. At a time in Turkey, Karim laments that "my wife almost left me. We have only one room and a parlour for me, my wife, and the children. We are always fighting and the children couldn't even go to school" (p.178). In order for the family to survive, Karim decides to leave for Germany through Bulgaria. In his words, "so, we say goodbye to my wife and my daughters. That night we did not sleep. All of us, we cry all night. I didn't know if I will see my little girls again, and my wife. But we have to go go, there is no choice" (p.179).

Karim, whose sole dream is to keep his family together starts to witness the separation of his family. Karim and the boys leave for Bulgaria while the wife and the girls remained in Turkey with a promise to reunite in Germany. Karim and his two boys succeeded in reaching Bulgaria on their way to Germany. Karim and the boys faced several hurdles in the migrant camp in Bulgaria. But on the verge of leaving for Germany, the forces of cynicism snatched the eldest son, Fadel, away from the hands of Karim. Fadel joins the Jehovah's Witness people and leaves for an unknown location in Switzerland. The agony of Karim knows no bound. The dream of a united family lies in tatters. The effect of this separation of loved ones is narrated by Karim that "when I tell my wife about Fadel she get angry. She start to cry, all the time on the phone. She say I lost her son. She say is my fault. She say she will never join me in Germany if I don't find Fadel (p. 190). The migrant has become like a tragic hero in Greeks tragedies. The more the migrants struggle to hold on to their dreams, the more the dreams fizzle away like dry sand enclosed in the palm of a man. The

more a man tries to hold the dry sand, the more it leaves the hand.

The cynicism associated with the narratives of the migrant in contemporary Nigerian diaspora novels, as dreadful as it may seem, does not abate with the failure of the migrants dream in all areas. There is the motif of return which surmises the emptiness of the migrants' struggle over the years in the diaspora. The motif of return is the result of all the failure of the migrant to find success in their endeavours. The return of the migrant is the sum of the futile propaganda that lured the migrant to the diaspora in the first instance. In the area of the effort of the migrant to pursue further education, the result most times is failure and eventual deportation. This is the fate of the unnamed protagonist of Habila's *Travellers*. At the end of his inability to get his PhD in the United States, he migrates with his wife to Germany. Then after a misadventure, he is deported to Italy where he finds his way home. At home, this migrant says of his mother that "I could hear the shame in her voice, her son who had gone to America had returned poorer and thinner than he had left". (p. 247). These migrant's words epitomise the emptiness associated with the projection of the return of the migrant. He say's that in his purse, "all my worldly possessions are in there, a pair of pants, some underwear, the book *The Leopard* by Tomasi di Lampedusa" (p. 234). This is the same migrant that left his home country with hopes of becoming a don; no cynicism can be more than returning a migrant empty.

As if this is not cynical enough, there is the issue of deportation from the diaspora. In this case, the migrant is packaged to the diaspora with fake papers or a visa with short duration. Once the migrant has outlived the visa, then the migrant becomes an illegal immigrant. This is the challenge faced by Obinze in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Obinze is a graduate who has searched for employment to no avail. His mother, who is a university lecturer, has gotten a six-month visa to the United Kingdom. She therefore adds her son's name to the visa as her research assistant. As usual with illegal immigrants, Obinze adheres to the admonition of Nicholas, another migrant that "if you come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work … the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin" (p.239). As Obinze grapples with a false identity, his woes are compounded when he is arrested and deported. The cynicism in Obinze's case is that like other migrants with similar fate, the whole struggle that Obinze passed through ended in failure. In the representation of the novelist's cynicism, Obinze is a lucky migrant who returned home with the pieces of his life. The worst scenario prepared for the migrant by the novelist is yet to come; it is the motif of death.

In exploring the theme of death of the migrant, our analysis moves back to the story of Sisi in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.* The death of Sisi, the migrant to Belgium, occurs in three stages. First, before she travelled from Nigeria, her birth name is Chisom. But as she is about to leave for the diaspora, she "decided to change her name, to adopt a name that she would wear in her new life. Sisi. Sister in Shona".(p. 44). So, Chisom died in Nigeria. Sisi arrives at Belgium and she is introduced to the work of prostitution to survive. Later, her Madam directed her to tell the Belgian authority at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that "… your father was a local Madingo chief and soldiers loyal to Charles Taylor came at the night to your house and killed your entire family … You survived for two weeks on what food you could get from the rubbish (p. 121). At this stage of Sisi's life, her identity is lost or otherwise dead. Then, in the line of duty as a prostitute in the diaspora, Sisi meets Luc who promises to help her escape the life of prostitution. At this point of realising her dream to be free to plan her life in the diaspora, she is murdered. Thus, the end of Sisi typifies other migrants like Mark, David and Juma in Habila's *Travellers* who all died without realising their dream of relocating to the diaspora. This is the hallmark of the cynicism associated with the migrants' narratives in contemporary Nigerian diaspora fiction.

4. Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that contemporary Nigerian Diaspora novelists are cynical in the portrayal of the migrant narratives in their novels. Several motifs like failure, loss, alienation, depression, deportation and death are used to illustrate the central idea of this paper that the novelists present the migrant story in a tragic mood. In the diaspora, in real-time, there are several success stories of migrant that are in the fore-front of the development of their diasporic countries or abode. But in the contemporary Nigerian novels dealing with diaspora narratives, the story of the migrant is represented as a total failure. What bothers the critic is the reason for creating characters who struggle to travel to the western world where the condition of living and the society is developed and then exposing the same characters to issues that at the end lead to failure, deportation or death of the migrant; the forfeiture of all that they have struggled to achieve. This calls for more critical study of the migrant narratives to fathom the interest of these novelists in

creating migrant characters with stories laced with cynicism.

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