



JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS,
THE UNIVERSITY OF BAMENDA

Special Edition

Diasporic Dialogues and Migration in The 21st Century

Funded by The University of Bamenda

<https://fajournaluba.com/index.php/jah/index>

JAH SPECIAL EDITION MARCH 2023

This article is published by JAH,
Journal of Arts and Humanities,
Volume 1, N. 1, March, 2023.

ISSN: 2710-3013 (Print)

ISSN: 2788-6360 (Online)

This article is distributed under a
Creative Common Attribution (CC-
BY NC-SA) 4.0 International
License.

Article detail

Received: September, 2021

Accepted: October, 2022

Published: March, 2023

Conflict of Interest: The author/s
declared no conflict of interest.



Migration, Diaspora Dialogues and Literary Discourses

BY

Eunice Ngongkum

Department of African Literature and
Civilizations University of Yaoundé 1,
Cameroon

*Corresponding Author: Eunice
Ngongkum

eunicengonkum@yahoo.com

+237 672936559

ABSTRACT

This paper is hinged on the premise that migration and its attendant outcomes of diaspora are features of human societies over time even though these have been so accentuated within the current global dispensation that the period has come to be known as the age of migration (see Castles et al 2013). It seeks to show that as a product of human society, literature, in general, and African literature in particular, has thematized the phenomenon, laying bare its provenance, routes and reaches. The paper argues that given that Africa has been in globalization since the 15th century, written African literature, which is a product of history, has foregrounded migration and the ensuing complex and varied diaspora dialogues emanating from the phenomenon. Through a textual reading of a range of literary texts, the paper shows how postcolonial theory



can be a convenient tool in interrogating the ways in which migration intersects the African cultural imaginary.

Keywords: *migration, diaspora, dialogue, literature, discourses.*

Introduction

The phenomenon of migration and its attendant outcomes has been a shaping template of much of human history. The 20th and 21st centuries, however, are currently being regarded as an unprecedented age of migration (see Castles et al 2013). This perspective is informed by the global scope of a phenomenon fueled by two world wars, many regional conflicts, the rise of totalitarian regimes around the world and, technological advancements which influence the rapid movements of people from one place to the other. A global outreach and the attendant politics undergird the consideration of these two eras as distinct from previous centuries as far as the issue of migration is concerned. Soren Frank notes, in this regard, in his book *Migration and Literature* that in today's global world, "the main protagonist ... is the migrant. No longer looked upon as anomalous, migration has actually become the norm and has resulted in a profound renegotiation of the concepts of identity, belonging and home"(1). Frank's observation foregrounds, not only the reach of migration but also its key outcomes of identity, belonging and home; outcomes which are inextricably bound up with the concept of diaspora. As migrations occur, they inevitably invite a dialogue about these crucial entities both by those who have left for other shores and by those who are left behind.

The phenomenon of migration within the context of globalization and its attendant diaspora outcomes, as it were, has attracted scholarly attention across disciplines such as anthropology, history, international law, ethnography, the social sciences, and literature. Literature, which is my focus in this paper, has always been engaged with the issue of



migration, capturing, in its wake, the diversity of experience and the complex consequences attending it, as I have noted above.

Through a postcolonial theoretical prism, my paper reads a selection of contemporary African literary texts as sites for exploring the intersection between migration and the African/ African diaspora cultural imaginary in the postcolonial context. I aim at showing how these works in their thematic and aesthetic paradigms lay bare the provenance, routes, and upshots of migration on individuals, groups, and the continent as a whole. I argue that from a historical perspective, Africa's encounter with the west, at different stages of its historical evolution, has occasioned mass movements of people from the continent to different parts of the world but essentially to the western world. These movements have resulted in complex questions surrounding the identity of the African diaspora (at the individual, national and continental levels) and its relationship with the continent as a whole. Written African literature, a product of this history, aptly delineates the multiple but unique variables that attend migration in this context as well as the ensuing diaspora dialogues. How the literature does this, constitutes the main focus of my intervention.

Postcolonial theory, according to Ato Quayson, "involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects" (par 1). Some of the experiences Quayson isolates are slavery, migration, and suppression. The history of migration in the African context is intimately bound up with colonialism/imperialism. During the period of slavery, many Africans were forcibly deported as slaves to the Americas. This group of immigrants constitutes the primary African diaspora population. After this era came colonialism which again saw an outward movement of African people from the continent to the western metropolises to acquire the necessary wherewithal to function within the colonial structures back home. It was this elite that was to assume the mantle of leadership during the fight for independence. However, for the majority, the expected fruits of independence failed to



materialize and today, the conditions of life in most African countries are so dire that many Africans daily leave the continent to find better livelihoods abroad. What kinds of dialogues have these different diaspora populations had with themselves and with the 'home' continent over time? How have these dialogues been captured in the literary discourses from the continent or from abroad and how do the dialogues further inform the concept of migration? Answers to these questions and more constitute the main thrust of my intervention but before I delve into the discussion, it would be expedient to define the key terms of my paper, namely, migration, diaspora, and diaspora dialogues.

At the risk of sounding redundant, migration refers to people moving to different places in search of a settlement. Many factors at the social, environmental, political, and economic levels inform migration. Today, for example, many people from the African continent are migrating to the west in search of better living conditions. At another level various categories of migration have been identified, namely, internal, international, permanent, and temporary, forced, or voluntary migration. My focus in this paper will be with the international, permanent, and temporary categories of the phenomenon. Furthermore, international migration entails movement to another country while permanent migration relates to someone leaving their country of origin with no hopes of returning. The dynamics of temporary migration entail a return to the home country at some point. This has given rise to today's concept of 'return' migration which will be examined in a number of texts.

Originally used in the context of the Jewish nation to designate its dispersion among the nations, the meaning of the term 'diaspora' has changed significantly over time. According to the International Organization of Migration, IOM, diasporas refer to "migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background." (IOM



Glossary on Migration, 2019). Robin Cohen (2008) notes that normally, diasporas are characterized by most, if not all of the following: migration, which may be forced or voluntary, from a country of origin in search of work, trade, or to escape conflict or persecution; an idealized, collective memory and/or myth about the ancestral home; a continuing connection to a country of origin; a strong group consciousness sustained over time; and a sense of kinship with diaspora members in other countries. These elements foreground the fact that any diaspora is a construction; an organic process involving movement from an ancestral land, settlement in new lands, and sometimes renewed movement and resettlement elsewhere. The various stages of this process are interrelated, yet discrete.

As far as the modern African diaspora, which is our take here, is concerned, Colin Palmer notes that it “consists of the millions of peoples of African descent living in various societies who are united by a past based significantly but not exclusively upon “racial” oppression and the struggles against it; and who, despite the cultural variations and political and other divisions among them, share an emotional bond with one another and with their ancestral continent; and who also, regardless of their location, face broadly similar problems in constructing and realizing themselves” (1998).

Diaspora dialogues, in the context of this essay, refer to the different conversations that the diaspora person engages in with himself or herself, his or her immediate surroundings and with his homeland on questions of race, identity and culture. Through these dialogues, bridges are constructed to stem the forces of fragmentation while helping all involved to survive the outcomes of migration. In the literature I analyze here, African immigrants tell their stories, how they have traversed the globe, experiencing other black people, white supremacy, and trying to affirm those identities and form a new pan-African identity. I begin with the examination of the conversation that began during the period of slavery.



Diaspora Dialogues during Slavery and after: Writing the Self into Being

As I have noted above, the most significant diasporic stream regarding the African diaspora, began during the period of slavery. The transatlantic slave trade which was responsible for the forced migration of between 12 - 15 million people from Africa to the Western Hemisphere lasted from the middle of the 15th century to the end of the 19th century. As these Africans traversed the Middle Passage to forced labour on plantations in the USA and the Caribbean, they were deprived of everything including their humanity, tortured, commodified, and even killed but these awful indignities did not kill their longing for survival and freedom. How they navigated such lives of privation and brutality is the subject of the slave narrative, a peculiar autobiographical mode in which the slave wrote himself/herself into being as a diasporic subject. The narratives were first-hand accounts of life under slavery, written by slaves themselves often following their journey from what Frederick Douglass described as "the tomb of slavery to the heaven of freedom." One such narrative is that of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African, in which he describes his own life history as an enslaved African from Guinea.

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, details a life largely spent on board ships, first as a slave and later as a captain's apprentice. When Equiano eventually comes into his freedom in 1776, he continues his search for identity and place throughout his peregrinations.

Sited in his unique experiences on board slave ships, Equiano's autobiography draws from his careful recordings of the former in travel logs. These will later be compiled into a powerful testimony against slavery, directed primarily towards important British parliament members who were examining the possibility of illegalizing slavery. The narrative vividly captures the geographic displacement and identity fragmentation which came with slavery as well as the memories which



connect the author back to Africa. Africa is present in Equiano's historical consciousness of his former life even as he grows to manhood and is confronted with new cultural forms in Europe and in the Americas. For example, in chapter one of the text, the author recollects life in homeland through an ethnographic perspective informed by thick descriptions of Igbo cultural life forms of dress, to political governance, to memories of a nation of "of dancers, musicians, and poets" (34). The values of simplicity and communalism are celebrated through vivid recollections of communities assisting in the construction of a home, whose structures are built for simplicity rather than extravagance (36). Even Igbo cuisine is "unacquainted with those refinements in cookery, which debauch the taste" (35). Respect for elders, one's parents, ritualistic circumcision, and the universe, including its ancestors, form the idyllic backdrop from which Equiano is kidnapped around the age of five or six and made a slave who then must struggle with his loss of 'home' and 'identity.' In the narrative, his cultural background serves as fodder to compare and contrast the different cultural views he encounters on his journey to manhood.

In the latter half of the narrative, the author continues to describe his identity shifts in a linear fashion. As he becomes immersed in European knowledge, he breaks away from traditional Igbo/African beliefs. By chapter four, Equiano admits, "I no longer looked upon them (whites) as spirits, but as men superior to us, I had a strong desire to resemble them; imbibe their spirit, imitate their manner" (78). By the end of the autobiography, Equiano comes to terms with his new self, which is an intersection of European and African values. Equiano undoubtedly reflects the double consciousness associated with the African values of his early youth, and with coming of age in European society. In later life, Equiano undertakes a journey of physical return to Guinea but dies in the process before reaching the continent, thus embodying, in his narrative and in real life, the conversations around the African Diaspora, Pan-Africanism, and discourses of return that came to define Garveyism.



In this way, his life and work heralded the Negro Renaissance, Negritude and the African Personality, key examples of African Diaspora dialogues over time.

In the wake of the abolition of slavery, many blacks migrated from the deep South to the North in the hope of finding better conditions of living in the economically viable urban centers. The great migration, as this movement came to be known, was the outcome of the failure of the abolition to deliver on the much expected change in the lives of African Americans. In the deep south where ninety percent of African Americans lived, Jim Crow laws, reinforced by disenfranchisement and different kinds of violence, was the quotidian reality of black people. In the north, these African Americans were to discover that the promise of a better life in the north was a mirage as racial prejudice acted as deterrent to their aspirations. For instance, they were segregated by practice in rundown urban slums, the largest of which was Harlem. The dilemma resulting from being caught in a continuing cycle of severe hardship in the deep south and the urban north, became a catalyst in the search for an identity. The urban environment, bringing together different peoples from different parts of the south and the Caribbean, provided the opportunity for informed conversations about the identity of the African American in the United States of America; an identity sited in a shared common experience in history and the uncertainty in their present conditions. Instead of wallowing in self-pity, these recently dispossessed blacks ignited an explosion of cultural pride in defiance of widespread prejudice and discrimination. The Harlem Renaissance, as this conversation came to be known, was to become an awakening of the entire black world to a sense of being. It was, to use the words of Alain Locke, "a spiritual coming of age of African American artists" who seized upon their first chance for group expression and self-determination.

The Harlem Renaissance, as an artistic movement, re-envisioned the black person beyond the obvious white stereotypes that had informed



the way in which African Americans related with themselves and with their heritage. From the thematic perspective, the artists sought to transcend the moral values and bourgeois shame about aspects of their lives that might, as perceived by whites, reinforce racist beliefs. In the aesthetic realm, two traditions were discernible; writing that perpetuated the traditions of traditional English literary forms and writing that exploited black vernacular speech and lyrical forms while creating works that identified with the masses. The movement, characterized by intense debate, was instrumental in the birth, growth and subsequent development of African American literature and black consciousness.

In a number of works, the promotion of racial pride, the embracing of indigenous African sentiments, questions of alienation and the experience of minorities in the United States take center stage. In Langston Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, for instance, the beauty and pain of being black, the definition of a black community beyond white stereotypes is foregrounded through a lyricism that draws from African oral literary forms and the African American dialect.

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is a free verse rendition of racial pride and the African American heritage which takes Africa and its rivers as its source. The movements through these rivers highlight the historical patterns of migration that have informed black life. The rivers also function to delineate the past with which the diaspora persona seeks to establish a relationship in order to better understand the present. The experiential ethos that must be assumed in that definition is captured in the line "My soul has grown deep as the rivers." For Hurston, the story of Janie Crawford, a middle-aged, thrice-married black woman serves to examine racism, black life, and the place of the woman in these contexts. Hurston's forte in this text lies in her unique employment of language, namely, the rural southern dialect and, through it as Henry Louis Gates Jr, notes, she engages "with the project of finding a voice, with language



as an instrument of injury and salvation, of selfhood and empowerment” (34). In all, the diasporic dialogue of the Harlem Renaissance was grounded in a rich and complicated intersection of progressive ideals and traditional African American folklore. This dialogue was, as I have noted above, instrumental in promoting subsequent black literature and consciousness on a worldwide scale, as other portions of this essay will demonstrate.

While the Harlem Renaissance advocated an African diaspora identity within the United States of America, the Back—to —Africa Movement of Marcus Mosiah Garvey grounded its diaspora discussion on the physical return to Africa for all African diaspora peoples. His nationalism was rooted in the view that the African American’s quest for social equality in the United States was a delusion given that as a permanent minority, they could never assimilate because the white establishment would never allow them to do so. Africa was the only place, according to Garvey, where self-emancipation could occur. His Universal Negro Association and African Communities League was instrumental in the resettling of former slaves in Liberia and Sierra Leone. While his brand of nationalism was considered unsuccessful because of its incendiary rhetoric, Garvey’s philosophy has been the basis of the return of many African Americans to the mother continent; a situation that has been captured in texts like Syl Cheney-Coker’s *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar* and Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes*. The former text, epic in tone and mood, employs the magic realist premise to explore the historical provenance of a fictional country Malagueta, a thinly disguised reference to Sierra Leone, with the settling of freed slaves in the vicinity of Freetown and the creation of a creole community which, for the writer, constitutes one of the ‘false starts’ in Africa. This false start has complexified the historical evolution of present day Sierra Leone, a country once considered a pearl in Africa. In the novel, questions of identity and the fraught relationship between returnees and the local populations take center stage as “[the



Creoles'] very westernization", according to John H. Cartwright, "set them apart from the indigenous tribesmen" (11). Syl Cheney-Coker's premise in this work is that "no convincing pan-Africanism can be articulated that disregards the cogency of local black adaptations to local black conditions" (Clarke 295).

Angelou's autobiographical strains in *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes*, examines her three year stint in Ghana in 1962 and subsequent return to America in 1965. The argument in the text is that, judging by Angelou's experiences, the return of diaspora Africans to the place of their African roots does not necessarily assuage the longing for home and identity. Angelou struggles with the sense of having two selves; an American one and an African one, leading her to conclude that "if the heart of Africa remained elusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings. The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go and not be questioned" (112). Her return to the United States at the end of the work is hinged on the understanding that physical space may not necessarily be an answer to finding oneself given that survival is dependent on finding oneself within the self as the quotation above highlights.

The textual examples above reveal that whether in the dialogues initiated by the Harlem Renaissance or Garveyism, that double consciousness, characteristic of the African diaspora ethos, is crucial in discourses of identity, home, and space in migrant contexts. Double consciousness, first mentioned by W.E.B. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, intimates the individual sensation of feeling as though one's identity is divided into several parts, making it impossible to have one unified identity. Dubois' philosophy, formulated within the context of race relations, has come to represent the reality for the African diaspora in varying degrees. The next phase of my paper examines migration within the colonial era and the dialogues ensuing from the meeting of Africans in different contexts during this period.



Diaspora Dialogues in the Colonial Period: Negritude, the African Personality and Return

The colonial period in Africa set in motion different kinds of migration devolving from colonial policies and African responses. One of such was the movement of people from the colonies to the metropolitan centers of Paris and London for education and cultural purposes. The case of the indigenous elite from French colonies was peculiar. Having been taught that they could only aspire to the “scale of respectable manhood” (Blyden in Irele 11) by assimilating the superior French culture, they moved to France for further education in this light. However, great was their disappointment to discover that they were considered lesser beings on account of their color. This situation became the rallying call for these black intellectuals from French West Africa and the Caribbean to come together in Paris in the 1930s to answer the ultimate question confronting the diaspora personality; ‘Who am I in this context?’ Answers culminated in the birth of the Negritude movement, an offshoot of the Harlem Renaissance and the Haitian Revolt, geared towards identifying and legitimizing the unique identity of the African. The movement was characterized by some basic tenets such as a movement away from all that Europe stood for, an appraisal of the African past and heritage to which the writers showed a deep and nostalgic attachment. In this wise, the writers were proud of belonging to the black race and assumed the objective historical and sociological implications of such a belonging.

These facets of Negritude philosophy find expression in the poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor. In poems like “New York” and “Assasinats” for instance, European civilization is portrayed and destructive, as one of lies, hatred and sophistry. Captured in images of hardness like “articulations d’aciers” (steel joints), machines and canons, this civilization is shown to be in need of the tempering and creative contribution of “black blood”, symbol of black culture.

New York! Je dis New York, laisse



Affluer le sang noir dans ton sang
Qu'il derouille tes articulation d'acier comme
Une huile de vie
Qu'il donne à tes ponts la courbe des
croupes
Et la souplesse des lianes (117).

In its celebratory ethos, various aspects of African life are feted in the poetry, such as the customs, the landscape, the African woman, and the rhythmic quality of African music. We find this in "Masques Nègres" and "Prières aux Masques", for instance, where the beauty and timelessness of African masks are exalted. For the poet-persona, these traditional items belong to the primordial, far removed in time yet immediate and present. Such timelessness not only bespeaks the very essence of the black race but punctures pseudo-racist theories of her inexistence until "discovery" by the white man.

Visages de masque fermé a l'éphémère sans
Yeux sans matières
Tête de bronze parfaite et sa patine de temps
Que ne souillent fards ni rongeurs ni rides ni
Traces de larmes ni de baisers
Visages tel que Dieu ta crée avant la mémoire
même des âges

.....
Je t'adore Ô beauté de mon œil monochorde (18).

These examples, by no means exhaustive, foreground the revolutionary nature of negritude writing as a dialogue about the condition of the diaspora African in the context of colonialism; a dialogue hinged on the affirmation of an African personality through the celebration of African values. It was a celebration that appropriated the language of the colonizer to revolve textual strategies that challenged the racial biases of colonial discourse, exposing and eroding their validity while foregrounding African values as the examples above have shown. It was



a diaspora dialogue sited in the model generally known as ‘writing back.’

In British colonized territory, a corresponding dialogue, built around the philosophy of the African Personality, saw the light of day and informed the poetry of the group of poets known as the ‘pioneer’ poets, namely, Raphael Greg Armattoe, Dennis Osadebay, Gladys Casely Hayford and Michael Dei Anang. The concept of the African Personality was the brainchild of Edward Wilmot Blyden, a Caribbean scholar, essayist and political thinker who was the first to coin the term. Developing his ideas from the intense national awakening in Europe in general and from the nationalist principles of the Italian Mazzini in particular, Blyden conceived of Africa as an autonomous grouping, one with a specific personality. He believed that the African’s value must be assessed, based on the culture and way of life underlying and moulding that personality. In the face of European prejudice and denigration, Blyden posited a new and firm attachment to Africa, deriving from a vision of a valid African civilization. The African was then perceived as a fully integrated person with a strong sense of spiritual values, of communion with nature and communal life. The sum total of the work of this intellectual was to bring the “black man, African and New World to a sense of self-recognition and a self-knowledge.” (qtd. in Irele, *Ideology*: 101).

While critics have noted the differences between Negritude and writing informed by the African Personality in terms of models and aesthetics, suffice it to say that in both frameworks, there was a common consciousness predicated on the myth of blackness as the rallying focus of Africans on the continent and its diaspora. Both ideals were primed on motivating and orientating the entire continent and the diaspora to action in the colonial context, irrespective of whether these were English-speaking, French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking. For Abiola Irele,



When we take a comprehensive look at ideological development among black people, what strikes one is the remarkable correspondence between its various areas of expression, and beyond this, the organic identity of thought. This factor excludes the possibilities of seeing a fundamental disparity between the concepts of negritude and 'African personality'... The two concepts thus stand in a reciprocal relationship as being, each in its own way, a formulation of a vision of the race founded upon an idea of Africa. (*Ideology*: 101).

The case of the 'Windrush' generation, namely, the many African-Caribbean people who after World War II, migrated to North America and Europe, from 1948 to 1970, needs special mention. Consequent on the losses during the war, Britain, for instance, encouraged mass migration from countries of the former British Empire and Commonwealth to respond to shortages in the labour market. Many Afro-Caribbeans, attracted by better prospects in what they considered the 'mother' country, made the journey. Many were to endure prejudice, intolerance, and racism from the whites, and this marked their relationship with the wider community. Ironically, these experiences became the springboard for the development of a shared Caribbean identity among immigrants from different islands and class backgrounds. Afro-Caribbean writers like George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Andrew Salkey and Kamau Brathwaite addressed the conditions of this group of immigrants in their works. For example, Lamming's 1954 novel, *The Emigrants*, examines the fortunes of these immigrants in metropolitan London, who come, expecting much from the 'mother' country because, as Lamming himself says in an interview, everyone "had lived so much with the idea of England as a facilitator, everybody was more or less sure that England would come to the rescue" (Nasta 2004, p.186). Unfortunately, experiential knowledge underlines the futility of those from the peripheries to expect anything better from the



center. The work details the journey of a wide cross-section of West Indians, the Governor and Tornado, Trinidadians, Collis, the Jamaican, Philip, and Dickson from Barbados to London. Through a complex narrative strategy, marrying the first and third person points of view, Lamming highlights the uneasiness of the migrants' journey from the point of departure to that of arrival and the struggles to settle down in London. The 'rude' welcome leads to alienation and disillusionment and occasions the dialogue first around an Afro-Caribbean identity which later extends to people from the African continent.

On the other hand, the dialogue surrounding the return of migrants from the metropolitan centers to 'home' spaces, continued to lay bare the conflict occurring within these contexts. Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is a quintessential text that explores the migrant's dilemma upon return to the home country; a return hinged on a process of re-adaptation in the home country and a personal reflective experience of belongingness. Obi Okonkwo returns to his native Nigeria after four years of study in Britain. While in Britain, Obi experiences nostalgia for home, memory, and desire for homeland. Through a series of vignettes, Achebe presents an Obi who, upon his return, is no longer at ease with his Nigerian kith and kin because he is caught between two worlds, namely, the traditional African and the European (Obi occasionally behaves like a Westerner in his dressing and cultural beliefs to the disapproval of his Igbo kinsmen and parents). Through authorial comments, the reader comes to understand Obi's dilemma when the omniscient narrator says that "the effect of Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his country" (57). Entrapped in the dialectic of difference and identity, the young man finds that he cannot completely dissociate himself from colonial culture, inherited from his father nor totally identify with the Igbo culture of his ancestors. Through Obi Okonkwo, the hybrid identities and the ensuing conflicts generated by these categories, that



have come to dominate much of contemporary African writing are laid bare as the next portion of my essay will show.

Migration and Diaspora Dialogues in the Postcolony: Afropolitanism/ Afropeanism and the Discourse of Return

As noted in the introduction, the world is currently in the throes of massive movements of people from one part to the other, as a result of many 'push' and 'pull' factors, chief among which are political, economic, and social aspects. With regard to the African continent and its diaspora, it has been noted that while the near collapse of social, political, economic, and educational structures in several countries on the continent has fueled migration, many more Africans since 1990, according to *The New York Times*, have voluntarily relocated to the USA and Canada than had been forcibly brought there before the slave trade ended. While these facts may be disputable, suffice it to say that the contemporary global scene has informed large migration of Africans to Europe and North America, often in search of better livelihoods. In this context, one no longer finds the hitherto binary perspective of migration namely, "a one way process of emigration from one country and immigration to another" (Mangala 6) but a transnational paradigm which links together countries of origin and destination. This is because migrants "develop and are often embedded in dense networks of familial, social, economic, political, organizational and religious relations linking countries of origin with those of destination" (Mangala 6).

At home at once in their home and host countries, these migrants assume the different heritages that inform their being in today's global world as a way of challenging often Eurocentric monolithic discourses on national identities. This has given rise to the now descriptive but fraught frames of contemporary African diapora dialogues such as Afropolitanism and Afropeanism.



Afropolitanism, coined by the writer, Taiye Selasi, a writer of Ghanaian and Nigerian descent, born in London and raised in Massachusetts, refers to Africans of the world who are not bound together by any specific language, mother tongue, religion, or culture. As people of the new African diaspora, “they understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart” (Balakrisnan 2016: 29). While Selasi defines it from a Western premise, Achilles Mbembe, on his part, looks at it from the point of view of the African continent. For Mbembe, Afropolitanism is “the presence of the elsewhere in the here”, the ‘interweaving of worlds’ caused by the movement of black and non-black people in, out and throughout Africa.”

Afropeanism, on its part, coined by Leonora Miano, refers to the ways in which the social, cultural, and aesthetic intersection of black and European cultures have come to define the African diaspora in European contexts. Both perspectives, their shortcomings notwithstanding, seek to construct diaspora cultural dialogue in the contemporary context of migration, challenging myths of national identity, the universality of Western culture, stereotyping and marginalization of Africans in Euro-American contexts. These concepts are discernible in some contemporary black texts. These literary discourses serve to reimagine alternative African ways of belonging in migrant spaces. The works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chika Unigwe, Taiye Selasi, NoViolet Bulawayo, Chris Abani and Teju Cole, just to name a few, reveal this perspective of things.

In these texts, the material conditions of reality in the home country that inform migration, the journeys and destination of migrants, as well as the complex relationship between these different aspects are foregrounded. *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo, for example, paints not only the journey made by African migrants through dangerous terrain as they are bound for the west, but also reveals why migration is the only way out for these children:



Look at the children of the land leaving in droves, leaving their own land with bleeding wounds on their bodies and shock on their faces and blood in their hearts and hunger in their stomachs and grief in their footsteps. Leaving their mothers and fathers and children behind, leaving their umbilical cords underneath the soil, leaving the bones of their ancestors in the soil, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. They will never be the same again because you cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you cannot just be the same (pp.145-146).

Through the technique of accumulation in this quotation, Bulawayo lays bare the existential reality of the failed economic and political status of many an African state that has fueled the migration drive of the people.

Unigwe's novels, *The Phoenix* (2005) and *On Black Sisters' Street* (2008), for their part, detail the migratory journeys of Oge, the protagonist-narrator of *The Phoenix* and the women from different parts of Africa of *On Black Sisters' Street*. The novels explore the physical, social, and psychological effects of relocation from Africa to Europe. Through a realist framework, the lives of female migrants are foregrounded, highlighting the harrowing experiences they witness on being black and female in the host country, Belgium. The novels detail, through dialogues and vignettes, how the identities of these women are transformed in these spaces. These transformations, which speak to the multilayered nature of today's African diaspora, reinforce the view that it is a diaspora characterized by a dynamic movement of peoples, cultures, and politics in a historical continuum. It is thus a hybrid/syncretic and transnational formation as the writers negotiate social identities and belonging of African subjects across race, gender, and social status, and, in the context, resisting imperial domination through hybridity.

Some of these texts like Adichie's *Americanah* explore a novel dynamic of return. While return is usually framed in involuntary terms, it is rather



voluntary in the novel. The text explores the fate of two young lovers, Ifemelu and Obinze, who migrate to the United States and the United Kingdom respectively, in a bid to respond to what the novel calls, “the lethargy of choicelessness” (276). They are thus out to experience something new elsewhere. After a successful stint abroad, Ifemelu returns to Nigeria out of a strong desire to do so. While her return migration is voluntary, it does not cancel the difficulties she encounters on re-integrating Nigeria. Home becomes a site of struggle given that Ifemelu also regards America as home. She had learnt to be at home in America and had acquired American citizenship. On return, the dynamics of home have equally changed but that the novel ends on the note of Ifemelu being established in the home is eloquent in establishing the different kinds of dialogues that people the African diaspora space.

Conclusion

My paper has shown that African literary discourses on migration, from a historical perspective, offer us an ensuing diversified diaspora cultural dialogue and complicated identities. The aesthetic and authorial trajectory of the texts present a dynamic ferment about these issues that began with the forced migration of Africans during the Transatlantic Slave Trade but one that has moved on to examine different kinds of migration informed by varied histories and geographies of the contemporary era. As Joseph E. Harris asserts, “The African diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography [space], class, and gender” (1993: 4).

WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. Heinemann, 1960.
Adichie, Chimamanda. *Americanah*. Vintage, 2014.
Angelou, Maya. *All God's Chillun Got Traveling Shoes*. Vintage, 1991.
Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. Black Bay Books, 2014.



-
- Cartwright**, John R. *Politics in Sierra Leone 1947-1967*. U of Toronto P, 1970
- Castles**, Stephen, Hein de Haas, Miller, Mark J. *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Guilford P, 2020.
- Cheney-Coker**, Syl. *The Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar*. Heinemann, 1990.
- Clarke**, George Elliot. "Syl Cheney-Coker's Nova Scotia, or the Limits of Pan-Africanism. *The Dalhousie Review*. dalspace.library.dal.ca. 283-296. Accessed 20th March 2021.
- Cohen**, Robin. *Migration: The Movement of Humankind from Prehistory to the Present*. André Deutsch, 2021.
- Equiano**, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*. Chump Change, 1789.
- Frank**, Søren. *Migration and Literature*. Günter Grass, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Jan Kjaerstad. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Gates Jr.**, Henry Louis, Appiah, K. A. Eds. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*. Amistad. 1993.
- Harris**, Joseph E. *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Howard U P, 1993.
- Hughes**, Langston. *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Penguin Random House.
- Hurston**, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Amistad, 2006. Irele, Abiola. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. Indiana U P, 1994.
- Lamming**, George. *The Emigrants*. Heinemann, 1954.
- Mangala**, Jack. "Diaspora Engagement and Circular Migration". A State of the Art Review of Policies and Practices in Africa and EU-Africa Relations. <https://www.svr.migration.de>. 2019. Accessed 20th August 2020.
- Mbembe**, Achille. "Afropolitanism." In *Cosmopolitanisms*. Bruce Robbins & Paulo Lemos Horta, Eds. New York U P, 2017: pp 102-107.



JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES
A JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS, THE UNIVERSITY OF BAMENDA

*Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH):
A Multidisciplinary Journal of the Faculty of Arts,
The University of Bamenda*

Special Edition

Diasporic Dialogues and Migration in The 21st Century

Funded by The University of Bamenda

<https://fajournaluba.com/index.php/jah/index>

-
- Nasta, Susheila.** Ed. *Writing Across Worlds: Contemporary Writers* Talk. Routledge, 2004.
- Palmer, Colin.** "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora." *The Journal of Negro History*. 85. No. 1/ 2. 2000: Pp 27-32.
- Quayson, Ato.** *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Polity, 2000.
- Senghor, Leopold Sedar.** *Poèmes*. Seuil, 1973.