MARGINAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DREAMS DEFERRED IN *FOREIGN GODS INC.* AND *THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS THAT HEAVEN BEARS*

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the ways some African Diaspora writers, Okey Ndibe and Dinaw Mengestu explore the African migrants' identity crisis and the interplay between identity and memory in the projection of their characters. In engaging the problems of twenty first century African Diaspora, the two authors portray characters who encounter the present pressing issues of place and marginal opportunities in a deeply self-conscious approach. *Foreign Gods Inc.* and *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* are works that articulate features of trauma fiction in the way the characters display individual and collective deep loss, intense fright, and the specific ways they form self-identity as a result of their frightening encounter with the outside. The two texts expose the individual and collective challenges that confront African migrants in America. These challenges highlight the larger problems that African Diaspora suffers in the quest to fit into the American society. The authors present their narration using the background of the characters which characteristically underscores the political history of the region.

This paper therefore, investigates migrant conditions of the African Diaspora that elicit feelings of despair and the rhetoric of big cities in the texts with its disappointing consequences. The paper also considers the opposition in African-American and African Diaspora relations as well as the deep-rooted suspicion among the blacks and whites. The paper concludes that political leadership in

Africa full of corruption and despots produces disillusioned and the exilic texts.

Keywords: African Diaspora, Marginal Opportunities, Trauma Fiction, African Literature.

Introduction

The two texts represent Diaspora fiction that constructs the idea of marginal opportunities whereby dreams of achievement are truncated. Characters are left to their own connivance and hybridity through which the physical and cross-cultural advancement of the constituents characterize the entirety of their way of life. This hybrid identity formation is perhaps pivotal to the African Diaspora writing. The writing has extended the imaginative perspective and enhances consideration in the various identity challenges. These problems have severally been traced to the point of migration and pointedly to the post-colonial political leadership of the African nations. Thus, African Diaspora literature has prompted historical perceptive into formation of communities, diversity and attitudes established by various immigrant groups. Consequently, African literary outputs with consistent representation of psychoanalysis increases in post-colonial works. Writers and critics have for long explored and continued to engage the relationship between psychology and literature. Trauma fiction therefore is the narrative of a hurt that screams for attention, that speaks to the reader in order to explain the actuality or the absence of fact not presented (Caruth, 1996). In literary trauma the text is the voice that speaks and its interpretation underscores the acknowledgement of all the materials in the narration. Michelle Balaev in *Literary Trauma Reconsidered* (2014) posits that literary trauma should be interpreted by a notional "pluralism" that gives room for the consideration of trauma's changeable constructions. These consist of such variables that observe a shift away from the perception of trauma as morbid and inexpressible. That determinedly continues to give evidence of some elapsed injury where instant comprehension of the traumatic experience is lacking. As Balaev asserts the concept is obvious in post-colonial

Anglophone African novels mitigated by an apparent multifarious course of "colonial trauma".

Consequently, Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc*. and Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, represent post-colonial failings of the continent and the plight of its Diaspora. Thus, the novels challenged some previous conceptions about African Diaspora, by engaging strained and disenchanted individual and collective experiences of the characters. They project the 'woundedness' and reality of the encounters as seen in their characters' unfulfilled dreams. Unfavourable political milieu, poverty, war, famine, and religious crisis encourage African immigration to the West; however, they have expanded the narration by incorporating the wandering experiences of the political exile and the Western educated migrant in search of a sense of rootedness in the host country. *Foreign Gods Inc*. is the story of Ikechukwu Uzondu who travels to America on a Rotary Scholarship, to study at Amherst University where he did well and graduates cum laude. However, when he tries to join the American Labour Market, he is told he is not good enough in spite of his American education. He tries cab driving business, gets married for residence permit, and divorces shortly after. The divorce causes his financial bankruptcy and the incapacitating effect of his woes will cause him to enter into a contract with arts dealers to trade his ancestral deity to the company Foreign Gods Inc. Ike's problems in America are made worse by his inability to provide for his mother and sister in Nigeria. Ndibe also exposes the politic of the Nigerian government and the corrupt practices that reign in public establishments. *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is the story of the protagonist, Sepha and his African friends who migrated from Ethiopia, the Congo and Kenya to America. Sepha Stephanos is driven out of his country, Ethiopia during the Red Terror rule of Haile Mengistu. His lawyer father was killed in the attack and eleven years old Sepha witnessed the killing including other members of his family. He escapes and travels to Somalia from where he migrated to America. He joins his uncle who is also an exile having been on the wanted list of the Ethiopian

government of Haile Mengistu and his property seized. Their struggle to adapt in America while always thinking of home is the concern of the two novels. For Ndibe and Mengestu it is easy to tell this story as African migrants in the US.

Language is one of the features in the migration pattern of Africans as they tend to migrate to countries they share linguistic affinity with. As Anglo-phone countries West and East African countries were colonized by Britain making English the Lingua franca. America therefore becomes one of the migration destination choices for Anglo-phone countries because of the similarity in language. In *Language and Migration*, (2016) Adsera and Pylihova identify "language proficiency" as an important qualification for international migration. It is that salient factor that determines a migrant's acceptance and functionality in the host country. Since the outcome of immigration is expected economic value, knowledge of a language makes it possible for migrants to get good employment. Apart from the provision of jobs, language skill of a migrant in a host country determines the success of other things. Ike and Sepha are the protagonists that experienced their first cultural shock as a result of their perceived language incompetence in the quest for employment. Language as the vehicle for Ike's development, and demonstration of his potential as an American trained economist ironically becomes the stumbling block to his attaining the goal. The first shock and disappointment is his experience at the Frisch Investment Inc. After acquiring a work permit, he is told "your credentials are excellent, but the accent is crappy" (32). His high expectations of life in America after his college degree ended shamefully. Ike remembers his college days, how girls flock around him because of his accent, but being constantly told "the accent isn't right!!" traumatizes and fills him with resentment. When he stresses "I speak English…I took English courses at Amherst-and I made straight as," Ike is perplexed as one whose identity and existence is fragmented. There is an element of disconnection between his American view and the reality he deals with everyday. The reader experiences this anxiety during his desperate meeting with Stacy at

the Foreign Gods Inc. Her reply "I recognized that accent!"(6), destroys the previous "gusty boost" the thought of his financial liberation through Ngene gave him. Instead of improving his duty to his family back home, Ike's accent becomes the reason he is not able to do enough. His confidence in his commonality with America is ruptured by the constant derogatory reference to his accent. From the linguistic level and racially Ike is relegated to the bottom in the American class. The negative stereotype is construed as humiliating by Africans and in this case, it puts a psychological strain that affects his overall wellbeing and heightens his anxiety. Ike's extreme nervousness about his financial constraint is what made him easily consent to commercializing Ngene the deity.

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* Sepha like Ike in the early days of his arrival in America suffers the mistrust other Americans exhibit against Africans. The manager of the Capital Hotel where his Uncle got him a job doubts his ability to speak English. The manager expresses other misgivings including his capacity to lift heavy objects and his honesty in order to prevent pilfering. This profiling of the African migrants as misfits psychologically affects Sepha and his uncle Barhane. The only reason they resort to menial jobs is to survive the uncertainty that pervades their existence in America as political exiles. Unlike Ike who is from a poor family, they are from rich Ethiopian background. And their social descent in America is as a result of the political turmoil in Ethiopia, which puts them in that vulnerable position. His Uncle Berhane was a rich man in Ethiopia by all standards but when the Red Terror Soldiers took over his mansion, he ran away to America with nothing.

The financial stress Ike and Sepha suffered in racist America reveals the African migrants' endless schemes for survival, as Ike also tried gambling in order to escape the hardship. They are always in turmoil, engaging memory, reliving their past experiences of intense humiliation. As classical of trauma victims they react to their plight in different ways in the hope of improving their chances to adapt. Ike blames his mother for his gambling simply because of the strain of her financial demands and his

inability to meet the obligation. Sepha, who abandons his menial job at Capitol Hotel and the Ethiopian community in Maryland, moves to Logan Circle to start a business did not fare better than the others. For instance, his friend Joseph came to America with the dream of obtaining his PhD in the University of Michigan. Several years down the line he has not achieved that dream. He is rather doing low paying job and his connection to American education is his old student's notes which he relies on to maintain that illusion. Caught in-between this failure is his attachment to his old student ID card which he uses to visit the school library. His other friend Kenneth has failed in his quest to work in American as an engineer. And in order to be accepted into the American mainstream, he mimics the American accent. His mimicry psychologically exposes his shame in the position he finds himself as second-class citizen. Joseph on the other hand takes solace in the memory of Africa and at every opportunity he brings up the continent and issues bordering her underdevelopment and political instability. Their sense of lack is likened to Dante's "Some of the Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears" (99). The line from his poem "Inferno" according to Joseph can only be understood by an African whose experience of America is a mixture of "hell everyday with only glimpses of heaven in between" (100).

In addition, their experiences of unsettled life in America set them on a transition-like course. Yet, in spite of the reality of unequal opportunities America presents, the characters keep hope alive. Sepha and his friends relish the fact that some days in America are good; on those days "America is beautiful after all… this is not a bad place" (5). Unlike Sepha and his friends, Ike on the other hand is "perplexed" at the thought of America as a beautiful place. When his friend Usman tells him "you'll rise again" (54), he finds the idea of America as a land of opportunities "ridiculous". His declaration to Usman 'I'm a foreigner, I don't belong … academics, rushing to theorize me into an exile. That's why I refuse to wear that tag" (65), is basically an accusation. America reneges on her promise to tolerate others in a relationship that is supposed to be mutual. Instead of totally losing hope, they

re-strategize on ways to survive. Sepha is convinced by his friends to add a deli counter in his shop to diversify while Ike is reminded of Ngene's global potential. The job rejection of the African migrant by American employers is a reflection of the innate resentment against African Diaspora. The authors are therefore concerned with the impact these maltreatments have on the migrants. Their narration is not just about their plan to escape from the reality; rather it is a sort of testimony to their unending suffering.

Apart from their individual experiences, their historical background plays a role in the understanding of their characters. The history of their traumatic experiences as a community helps to recognize that reliving the past does not wipe away history but instigates its beginning where immediate understanding may not (Caruth, 12). Ndibe and Mengestu depart from individual traumatic experiences to highlight wider issues as challenges of leadership in the homeland, and families left behind. Mengestus in characterizing Sepha and his uncle Berhane as Ethiopian exiles turns his narration towards despots in Africa's political landscape. Mengistu Haile Mariam was Ethiopia's ex-president and mastermind of the Red Terror Campaign that killed thousands of perceived enemies to the regime including civilians. Situating his story within his regime gives Mengestu the freedom to beam his search on other African juntas like Mobutu, Idi Amin, and Bukasa including the political parties that assume various nomenclatures with each successive coup and revolutionary movements. Sepha's father was summarily killed because he worked for the government of Haile Selassie and was a Lawyer. He is killed because a student's Pamphlet for Democracy found in the house belonged to Sepha and to protect his son, the father claimed ownership. Sepha left home the next day on his mothers "insistence", with nothing but the family jewelries to pay for the passage to Kenya. The only thing left by the time he reached America is his father's cuff links.

The recollection of memories of the past by the characters directs the reader to the perspective of their individual and

collective traumatic experiences. James Onley (1998) has declared that "memory' facilitates and enlivens the story which presents structure for recollection, enhances it and occasionally dislocates memory. Memory of the homeland in this way supports the migrants' construct of his/her identity. Zeleza (2009) describes memory as the single important evaluation of migrants' form of "self-conscious" that consists of recollection, envisioning, and connecting to the motherland that is in itself part of the Diaspora. As part of their hybridity African Diaspora communities are bound by their shared history and identity as displaced people. Realizing their displacement, they unite to keep memories alive and maintain touch with the homeland. Furthermore, they create a support system where encouragement and help is easily obtained. Ike and his network of friends keep negotiating one trick to the other for survival. The last of which is the advice from Jonathan Falla, who had sent him a copy of the *New York* magazines advertising Mark Gruel's art gallery Foreign God's Inc, suggesting Ngene's commercial viability. It is through these networks of friends that Sepha also retains any semblance of family, they support each other financially. His relationship with Jo-Jo and Kenneth help both in keeping the spirit of the homeland living in their memory, as they engage in games that satirize Africa's despots and unstable political state. These strategies are employed by the characters as a way of maintaining touch with their pasts. Remembering and telling their personal stories of Africa acts as catharsis that purges their traumatic experiences and keeps them as one family. Dinaw Mengestu himself explains this as suitable for creating new identities, through this gathering; the reader gets to know each character's failure, as well their collective failings. Their collective experiences of shock place African Diaspora as culturally traumatized group. Cultural trauma destroys just like individual trauma as they constitute social creation with unfavorable repercussions. Cultural trauma happens once people collectively perceive acts targeted at the group with serious consequences on their consciousness, altering and shifting their potential identity in deep permanent behavior (Alexander, 2004) He emphasizes the

relationship between individual and collective trauma to be sometimes driven by personal incidences of grievance and anguish. However, it is the indication of danger to the group that determines cultural trauma and not the personal identity that delineates the category of affliction. The simple way in determining the parties involved is the question of responsibility to the whole instead of particular to an individual. Therefore, Ndibe and Mengestu present America as the site of trauma for African Diaspora's culture shock and the resultant hybrid formations.

Consequently, the authors explore the culture conflict and relations between African Diasporas and African-Americans. Ndibe in portraying Ike's wife Bernita as the character that gives him the most humiliating experience reveals this relationship to be frosty. This is also seen in Sepha and Mrs. Davis relationship as neighbours in Logan Circle. The relationship is full of disrespect as Bernita taunts Ike the most about his African heritage and accent. Ndibe incorporates this motif to tackle the misconceptions each group have of the other. They lack adequate knowledge of their shared history, and varied culture. The African Diaspora and African-American blacks depend on media stream of information as the one being underdeveloped and the other, violent and lowly in the American social status. These perceptions encourage the suspicion in the association of both blacks who share common ancestry. Africans are inclined to believe black-Americans are aggressive, while the later are likely to assume Africans are uninformed and archaic. Veroni-Paccher (2016) stresses these sensitivities as therefore amplifying the flexibility of 'blackness', as a result of situating the importance on the array of encounters of African migrants in the USA. A practical demonstration of African-Americans' lack of comprehension of the African migrant's culture is Bernita's constant use of the South-African word "Zulu" as a slur to "curse" and mock Ike, a Nigerian. His endless correction on who a Zulu is and the country of origin falls on deaf ears as Bernita derives pleasure in Ike's painful reactions. Besides, Sepha is always reminded of his place in America by Mrs. Davis. On Sepha's reminder that Judith their white neighbor can

live anywhere she chooses to reflect America's notion of freedom, Mrs. Davis expresses her perceived idea of Africa as a nation of huts where freedom is scarce: What do you know about free countries? You didn't even know what that was till you came here last week, and now you're telling me people can live where they like. This isn't like living in a hut, you know. People around here can't just put their houses on their backs and move on (23).

Mengestus uses Logan Circle neighbourhood to query this misconception and suspicion involving Africans, African-Americans and even whites, suggesting tolerance and peacefully coexistence in America. Given the multiple identities in the country he depicts Logan Circle as a microcosm of the larger American society. He characterizes Logan Circle as a hitherto rich neighbhood that had fallen into ruins with crumbled edifices. Occupied by blacks at the exit of its rich white pioneers, Logan Circle's value is further diminished. The neighbourhood however is at the verge of reclaiming its value with the incursion of white buyers like Judith who refurbishes the choice houses to the resentment of the blacks. This development is disrupted by the destruction of Judith's fine house and the attack on her person by some members of the black community. Franklin Henry Thomas who burnt the house down is offended by Judith's effrontery in settling in a black neighbourhood peopled by poor blacks. The act which reduces the once beautiful house, the center of attraction in Logan Circle, to its former ugly state portrays the retrogressive nature of the division amongst the two groups. He did not just burn the house but actually planned on taking possession of the building. When the whole African-American community agreed to force Judith off Logan Circle, Sepha in spite of his acquaintances with her is unable to help her because of his incongruent identity with either of the classes. To both black and white Americans he remains at the intersection of American relations, not completely belonging. Through their experiences Ike and Sepha exist in the sphere of memory throughout the narrations. In their negotiation of memories of the past, the reader is confronted with the image of a people adrift. Their displacement exposes the African Diaspora as

neither here nor there. And every attempt to belong in the mainstream of the so called American dream is defeated.

In addition, African Diasporas are psychologically traumatized at their failure to help their families back home. Ike's shame at his mother's poverty and his inability to lift her burdens, corroborates Der Kolk's (2002) statement that trauma affects both the wounded and their family members. This shows that the unfulfilled dreams of the migrants has direct effect on families left behind. Mails from Ike's sister detailing his mother's expectations and woes always traumatize him. Reading the mails is always devastating and gives him headache "on the right side of his head", and he complains "it hurt to read the mails" (93). The novel touches the nervous conditions of victims of money-making Pentecostal preachers who feed on the people's ignorance. The African Diaspora frustration is made worse by the assumption that people abroad are economically better than their African relations. An assumption that increases the demands that put pressure on Ike who is also explored by his mother's Pastor, Pastor Uka. He demands for one thousand dollars to fight Ngene and fifty thousand dollars for his church. Having brainwashed Ike's mother, Pastor Uka sees Ike as an easy prey. On the other hand, Sepha is ashamed to be receiving money from his mother even after his graduation and venture into business. His shame is palpable during a telephone conversation with his mother on Christmas day. Her Christmas gift to Sepha is a money order that he uses to pay for the call.

Another approach for survival is romantic relationship and marriage with American women. Ike's first attempt with Penny failed woefully as the prejudice displayed by Penny's father so bruised his ego that he walked out of the relationship even though both truly loved each other. Ike's attempt at getting a "green card bride…for a fee of five thousand dollars" (26) also failed. He is pressed hard by his failure to work with the Bay Bank on the basis of lack of authorization permit. His marriage to Bernita secures him a work permit and green card. Paradoxically, his marriage to Bernita who magnanimously married him after he offered to pay

her for it did last or provide a better condition. The legal paper that came with the marriage did not make life as comfortable as he envisaged. Her huge appetite for sex puts a strain in their relationship, coupled with her constant accusation of cheating anytime he turns down her sexual overtures. Ike is disenchanted at the way things are turning out for him after marriage. He had thought he would get employment easily with the green card and enjoy marital bliss. Rather, the wife, Bernita, openly cheats with neighbourhood guys and their divorce sends him into bankruptcy, alienated, and put him further into depression. Ike is therefore fixed in his "unbelonging" in America. To his African family, he is the son who has gained the affectations of American life to the detriment of his family back home. What they do not know is that he spends all his earnings to Bernita in alimony or else he faces jail term. Thus, Ike is distressed that while in America he is still seen as a typical African whose accent is unpleasant to the sensibilities of the average American. This is evident in both his love relationship with Bernita and with others. Sepha on his part enjoys a brief Upper-Class friendship with Judith and her daughter Naomi. At the time of this relationship; he is oblivious to the lack that pervades Logan City. However, he is thrust back into the squalor when Judith pointed out the class difference between them. While it lasted he enjoyed all the privileges of enlightened class; picnics, readings of classics and gained sense of family. Nevertheless, his relationship with Judith represents the larger American society that places boundaries between it and other cultures.

This boundary is highlighting the interactions between the Caucasians, African-Diasporas and African-Americans. Their intolerance and distrust for one another is at display in Logan Circle. At the Logan Circle, Sepha is a minority even though the community is populated by black African-Americans. The diverse American culture has polarized social relations among its communities. Judith's entrance into Logan circle creates a problem that he is excluded from interfering. His migrant status means that he is an outsider with no rights in the scheme of things in America.

During the conflict about the eviction of Judith between officials and the African-American members of the Circle he stated, "but I knew my place…it was behind the counter, not in the middle of a dispute in which I had no part to play" (192). The suspicions with which the Americans both whites and blacks view the African migrant puts Sepha in a position where both sides suspect him. He is always at the receiving end of the anger of the African-Americans who see him as an interloper without much stake in the community. Judith on her part does not feel him different from the rest of the black residents who ganged up against her. Moreover, his inability to come to her aid openly is enough for anybody in her shoes to conclude that he is siding with his own. It is this unfortunate situation that killed any hope of their relationship progressing further from good neighbours to lovers.

Moreover, one of the constant reminders of the evidently disturbing African migrants' experiences of psychological dislocation in America is their living quarters. The apartments are always low quality and cheap. Ike lives in a cheap apartment without enough utilities, his despondency is heightened by this unpleasant accommodation with "dank, poorly lit stairway, ever present frowsy smell, commingling spilled liquor, urine…" and "his living room that sizzles with heat" (39). Sepha's living quarters and store are in deplorable state with neighbours that are poor. His Uncle lives in "one-bedroom apartment in a dilapidated building on the edge of a city" (141).

In their daily rumination of their past, present and possible future, the dire conditions of habitation are tied to the marginalized experience. Ike' building constantly reminds him of his inability to blend into the American society in spite of the different strategies he applied to belong. Sepha is looked at with suspicion each time he visits his uncle's home at the Ethiopian commune. Because he abandoned them and moved out, they always take him as one running away from his people. Sepha is amused at their desperate need to hold onto their Ethiopian traditional way of life while in America. Their communication in Amharic and social interaction within the complex reflect the "old lives and relationships

transported perfectly intact from Ethiopia" (116). In their little Ethiopia is the incursion of new habits like the audacity of Dr Negatu's daughter in coming home with a cab alone in the morning. The women gossip about drug abuse, infidelity and are afraid that "with enough time… there won't be any Ethiopians" (118). Mengestu describes the attitude of the women as that of a people apprehensive of their gradual formation of new identities, a hybridity that reflects a "vanishing culture" (118). The fragmented nature of Ike and Sepha's identities are entrenched in the culture of social inequality in America. The point is, racial discrimination still exists in America and African migrants are at the receiving end. Mohan and Zack-Williams (2002: 216, 218) elaborate this to say that the idea of African Diaspora identity is blurred as some "identities are not 'negotiable' while cultural identity has the propensity to be reinvented sometimes among its Diaspora: And become important axis of political and cultural belonging. In all cases we need to situate discourse about Africa, identity and belonging (such as Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism) within the context of a diaspora in which racism plays central part.

The Ethiopians strive to hold onto a culture that is at the verge of alteration and is seen as their last vestige of identity even as the American space is prejudicial in accepting others completely.

Another aspect of the American environment that heightens the characters' disillusionment is the nature of the cities. Although both characters live in big American cities, their lives are lived on the fringe filled with loneliness. In Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc*. and Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, Ike, Sepha and their friends exist in solitude. Sepha lives in a poor section of Washington DC, Logan Circle, while Ike lives in New York. The big cities have different effects on both of them. Sepha while in extreme loneliness wanders round the city of Washington DC "window shopping" and desiring the lives of opulence he observes- different from that in Logan Circle. Ike's move to New York and the acquisition of his work authorization instead of adding to his economic independence, add to his already frustrated

life. Ike is 'unnerved by some of the things that made the city vital". (31) The unending crowds, the traffic, and towering buildings. The Empire State Building gives him the impression that the building will collapse on him, while Manhattan's smallness gives him security.

Sepha is in complete adoration of Washington DC, its monuments and statues especially the White House, the Washington Monuments and the Statue of General John Logan at the Logan Circle. This admiration also ironically exposes the plight of minorities as well as African-Americans who suffer marginalization. They live in acute poverty and struggle to earn a living even when they share the same environment with the rich in American mega cities. Sepha mentions this great divide between the rich and the poor as: "prove that wealth and power were not immutable and America was not always so great after all" (16). The same lack is evident in living arrangement of barely furnished Kenneth and Joseph who "both hate the city now" (10) and prefer the suburbs with their barely furnished apartments. The suburbs provide them with sense of obscurity that reduces the humiliation the city encourages. The marginal opportunities even in great American cities is disappointing to the characters who before their sojourn thought it would be easy to break through the American dream.

Conclusion

The notion of return to homeland is very important to the African Diaspora and the authors handled this notion in different ways to redirect attention to the cultural and political situation of Africa. Ndibe also presents the rot in the Nigerian government, public and religious institutions as seen in Ike's lived experiences back home. Importantly, his visit underscores the need for African Diaspora to maintain touch with the homeland. By highlighting African traditional belief motif, Ndibe uses it to introduce the contending powers of tradition represented by Ngene, Christianity and modernity. The force of Ngene is first disclosed to the reader through Ike's dreams and storm psychosis. He is deeply scared and

damaged by the spells and "it was the shamed that made the experience anguished, impossible to forget." (17)

As Ike is immersed in the history of Ngene's power and missionary Stanton's fight to dominate the deity, he is gradually obsessed with this tussle. Towards the end Ike and Stanton are one, as his mission is invariably same as Stanton's. Stanton and Ike battle with their different psychological problems in their dream states accompanied by frenzied and sometimes lethargic consequences. Stanton whose ego is bruised writes profusely after such condition while propelled by his suffering in America, Ike is more determined to sell off Ngene. Ike's accomplishment in stealing Ngene traumatizes his people especially his uncle Osuakwu the priest of Ngene. It is his wailing that reminded others of the missing god. However, in America as soon as Ike sets Ngene in his apartment, he starts to experience certain malady that also invaded Stanton's mind in his battle of wills with Ngene. His apartment is overtaken by ghoulish presence, foul stench, voices, and in his troubled sleep he and Stanton are one entity. He suffers hallucinations, hears strange voices, and experiences bouts of spells and physical pains that put him out of action just as Stanton.

Caruth's assertion that "sometimes a traumatic address comes from our past" (139) captures Sehpa's position as his condition is more pitiable. As a political exile home is far away, therefore, he sees glimpses of home in symbolic connections like his uncle's little Ethiopia. Sepha is resigned to fate and sees no possibility of return. Yet, at the end of the texts, there are no positive sign of change in their status in America. After seventeen years in America, Sepha recognizes his true situation: "I am a desperate man on the verge of middle age with only the money in his pocket to spare" (115). While Ike is destroyed by the theft of Ngene, he is determined to amend his ways. Asking Gruel to give him back Ngene is his way of maintaining that connection. The text upholds the sacredness of Africa's cultural belief in the face of modernity. That is why in his distressed state Ike's only desire is the restoration of Ngene to Utonki. Not even the additional money or Gruels' belated "I like your accent and all" (330) a praise and

money he has waited for thirteen years to hear, can sway his decision.

Ike's thirteen years of struggle ended in a horrible manner. The texts as trauma and African Diaspora novels effectively depict the constant challenges of African migrants in America. The novels validate these traumatic experiences in a manner Alexander claim are unexpected and destructively shape communal identity. Thus, Ndibe and Mengestu successfully build on their characters' continuous construction of diasporic and African identities to capture their hybrid, traumatic and dislocated experiences.

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