

THE DIALECTICS OF MIGRATION AND EXILE IN OKEY NDIBE'S *FOREIGN GODS, INC.*

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Abstract

Migration and exile constitute recurrent leitmotifs in recent postcolonial narratives. Existing studies on migrant fiction focused on the clandestine and risk-laden movement of migrants in search of greener pastures, with little attention paid to the concrete experiences of migrants in their host lands. This is the thrust of this study which examines the dialectics, travails, and ambivalences of migration and exile in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* The study adopts Cathy Caruth's model of trauma theory as well as Irene Visser's perspectives on trauma as its theoretical framework. Interpretive design was adopted. The text was purposively selected because of its apt inscription of migration and exilic experience. The tropes deployed are the diaspora, identity negotiation, nostalgia, and return migration. Findings reveal that disenchanting realities particularly ambivalences, displacement, alienation, solitude, travails, and hostility typify the migrant's experience in the host land. Related tropes of rootlessness, frustration, regrets, and trauma encapsulate the exile's experience in the United States of America. The traumatic travails the migrant undergoes in the host land finds expression in seclusion, alienation, displacement, frustration, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorders. Thus, rather than being the much anticipated Eldorado, the suffering inherent in exile becomes more severe than the ones the migrant had run away from in the native homeland. Among Third-World subjects, migration is inscribed as a phantasmal search for the ideal and an experience in disillusionment, ambivalences, and trauma.

Key words: Migration, Exile, Dialectics, Ambivalences, Trauma

Introduction

One of the most outstanding characteristic features of literature that stand it out among other disciplines in the arts and humanities is that it captures both the milieu and the moment. Literature vividly mirrors society with a view to projecting its positive sides and values on one hand, and frowning or attacking its imperfections on the other. One of the succinct issues of the "moment" recreated by contemporary creative artists the world over, especially among Third-World writers in particular, is migration and its concomitant aftermath, exile. Migration is not a new phenomenon in human experience; it is one of the earliest realities of humanity's multifarious experiences. Records abound about the primordial or early migration of people from one part of the earth to another. In "The History of Human Migration: A Genomic

Approach”, Michael De Fillipo, et al, state that the first ever human migration took place between sixty thousand and seventy thousand years ago, and that it was these journeys that saw people move and occupy the present-day Europe, Asia, Australia, America, and subsequently every other part of the world. The study further states that the first homo sapiens lived in Africa before later finding reasons to migrate elsewhere. Explaining the basis for the movement, the study notes that changes in climatic conditions over time formed the basis for many of these peoples to consider migrating to other distant parts of the world (cited in Micah Asukwo, 60).

Corroborating the above, Guy Gugliotta’s study titled “The Great Human Migration” posits that homo sapiens first lived in Africa and that at about seventy to eighty thousand years ago, these peoples began to disperse and fill the remaining parts of the world as a result of sustained changes in the climatic conditions of the initial settlement (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com>). Similarly, Michael Price, a foremost American archaeologist, notes that “all non-Africans alive today descend from a single wave of migration out of Africa, perhaps between 50,000 and 60,000 years ago”, and that the need to explore the world formed the basis of the journey (<https://www.science.org>). Exploring the history of the people of the present day Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Uwem Akpan posits that all the ethnic groups that constitute the geographical space known as Akwa Ibom State originally settled in Usak Edet, Edik Afaha, to be précised, in the present “day Republic of Cameroon before migrating to their present locations. He attributed the basis for the journey to sustained and unfavourable changes in the climatic condition of the area over time, adding that “constant family strife...combined with these geographical dangers to worsen the peace and social condition” of the people, formed part of the fundamental grounds for their resolve to “disperse to different directions of the sea and of the river and of the mainland, to seek for new homes and settlements” (231).

The Bible, which, indubitably, is one of the earliest sources of English literature especially during the Medieval and Renaissance Periods, is inundated with enormous migration stories or accounts. For example, on divine instruction, Abraham had to leave his biological home, Ur, for Canaan, to establish a new nation. Jacob and his family migrated from Canaan to Egypt to avert a severe famine. Several years later, and on divine instruction, the same family, this time as a nation (Israel), migrated from Egypt to the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. The scriptures also record that Jesus’ family had to migrate from Bethlehem to Egypt to avoid King Herod’s persecution (Genesis 11, 12, 46; Exodus 1; Matthew 2). Like migration, exile also has some primeval underpinnings. Just like the picture created above on biblical migration, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden as a result of their disobedience may be regarded as a literary narrative of a movement away from home to exile, as it marked the beginning of man’s wandering on the surface of the earth. This exilic wandering was continued by their offspring typified by Cain who killed his brother, Abel, out of intemperate envy and anger, and like his parents, received a curse from God (Genesis 3 and 4).

The literary art is replete with copious exilic inscriptions or representations. For example, upon discovering, after many years, that he killed his father, Laius, at the crossroads, and later married his mother, Jocasta, Oedipus blinds himself and gets banished from Thebes. This exile may be seen as a form of punishment and a way to purify the city from the pollution caused by his (Oedipus) abominable deeds (Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*). This scenario is almost exactly recreated in Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, adapted from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Here, Odewale suffers Oedipus’s fate by being banished from Kutuje after it is convincingly established that the man he killed at the place where the three footpaths meet and the woman he

subsequently married were his biological father and mother, respectively. In a somewhat different scenario, Okonkwo, upon killing, inadvertently though, a fellow Umuofian, is banished from the clan for seven years. Thus, for all these years, Okonkwo remains an exile in Mbanta, his maternal community, where he is granted a familial asylum in tandem with the culture of the people. In Mbanta, Okonkwo, alongside his wives and children, lives peacefully, engages in economic activities, and prospers therefrom (*Things Fall Apart*, 103-134). It is indeed safe to observe that right from primordial times, migration/exile had the capacity to provide solace to those who were confronted with some existentialist situations or challenges.

In contemporary times, however, artistic depiction of migration/exile narratives tends to paint a seemingly opposite picture of the experience. Rather than being the much anticipated Eldorado, migration in recent times is presented by many authors as risk-laden, precarious, and terrible experience especially among Third-World subjects. Toyin Falola's *The Human Cost of African Migrations*, for example, appraises the pains African and indeed Third-World migrants go through in a bid to leave the shores of their continent for Europe, America, and other economically viable segments of the world. The author observes that there has been a rather unprecedented and pervasive rise in migration trends among young Africans who seek greener pastures and a new lease of life in other climes. Falola's work succinctly paints a hypothetical picture reflective of the notion that African and indeed Third-World subjects are willing to pay any price humanly possible to have their lives improved somewhere far away from their traditional homelands (cited in Micah Asukwo, 61). The foregoing constitutes the thrust of this study which examines the dialectics and ambivalences of migration and exile in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*

Review of Related Literature

A literary text is like a finished product by a manufacturer. The manufacturer takes credit for the idea, funds, skill, and indeed all that has been put together for the production of the item. Though the product can advertise itself to an extent through its physical texture and other aesthetic features, it remains largely the responsibility of advertisers and consumers to market the product and give it a wider publicity than its physical branding would have done. This is the same with a literary text - the intellectual property is that of the author, but the publicity of the work lies with the reader and/or the critic. In literature, critics are the marketers of literary products. They are to a literary text what advertisers are to economic products. They undertake the task of interpreting or critiquing a work of art. Like the lamp, criticism dispels the darkness or the opaqueness that may characterise a literary text even as it is also capable of offering "radical interpretations of cultures and culture materials formerly rendered oblique, exorcised and left in the shadow" (Raji-Oyelade and Okunoye, xxii). A typical work of art has various strands of meaning; it is only through criticism that these multifarious layers of meaning can be uncovered for proper understanding and appreciation. This is the preoccupation of this subsection of the study which appraises some of the hermeneutic positions and perspectives of critics in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*

Okey Ndibe is the author of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* The novel was published in New York in 2014. Set in both the United States of America and Nigeria, the novel chronicles the nasty experience of Ike, a Nigerian migrant in US which results in him taking risky decisions that leave him more frustrated, disoriented, and derailed than ever. Janet Maslin's review of the novel for the *New York Times* notes that the novel is one that "will have the impact of an astute and gripping new novelist's powerful debut" (<http://www.nytimes.com>). For Maslin, the narrative is evocative and soul-enlivening, a technique the author deliberately deploys to sustain

the reader's enthusiasm to the extent of the reader almost forgetting that "Ngene, whose high priest is Ike's uncle, is more than just a wooden artifact" (<http://www.nytimes.com>). Thus, for Maslin, *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is fundamentally, a piece of artistic excellence.

Samuel Ashworth's review of the novel for the *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) appears a bit polemical. For him, Ndibe presents his narrative as if his purpose were higher than "the creation of healthy, living fiction" even as he notes that as far as the novel is concerned, "matters of accurate language, tight structure, realistic characters and local detail" expressly fall beneath the author's gaze (<http://www.complete-review.com>). Ashworth's scathing stance on the novel is also observed in his description of the text as a work of art whose "motives are unexplained, words are rejected and suspense is rare" (<http://www.complete-review.com>). Ashworth's assessment, however, appears short of what Ndibe's work actually represents. Unequivocally, Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* is a piece of artistic creativity that deploys virtually every device and technique that is capable of making a work of art successful: accurate language, apt characterisation, impeccable structure, chronological and coordinated storyline, suspense, and so forth; in none of these areas can the text be found wanting. Therefore, while Ashworth reserves the right to hold on to his opinion about the novel, it can also be observed that his opinion is largely subjective and emotional.

Ainehi Edoro and Ikhido Ikheloa in their critical appraisals of *Foreign Gods, Inc.* observe that the novel has been heavily influenced by the works of Chinua Achebe. In "The Great God Heist – Review of Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*", Edoro observes that Ndibe's text reminds one of Achebe's works such as *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Arrow of God*, and that Ndibe copiously burrows a lot from Achebe especially the "culture-contact" motif that structures Achebe's early novels, and specifically lists references to gods, missionaries, shrines, and high priests which "evoke the now familiar language often used to tell the story of colonial encounters", as an approach originally popularised by Achebe, but now wholly adopted by Ndibe (<https://www.brittlepaper.com>). Coming from the same angle, Ikheloa, in "Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*: Of Moral Absolutism and Fallen Gods", remarks that Ndibe's work is one that has been heavily influenced by Achebe, hence, the need for the novelist to "openly" acknowledge the fact that he is not just one of Achebe's protégés, but also one whose idiolect, choice of character/characterisation, and other apparent paralinguistic affective devices have prodigiously influenced or shaped his artistry (<https://premiumtimesng.com>).

In "Gods for Sale, Religious Appropriation and Capitalism in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*", Thobekile Masombuka posits that Ndibe's novel is "a postcolonial postsecular novel in which the concepts of religious appropriation and capitalism...are used to explore the commodification of indigenous gods" (<https://www.tandfonline.com>). The critic argues that the text subverts the religious and the secular by exploring the worship of indigenous gods on one hand, and detailing their commodification on the other, and that this relationship may be explained by "postsecularist ideas that argue that the sacred and secular are interconnected in postcolonial literature" (<https://www.tandfonline.com>). Examining the text from thematic and stylistic angles, Bethrand Ochor identifies corruption, marriage/matrimony, and social segregation, among others, as some of the key leitmotifs of the work while listing literary forms such as humour, flashback, suspense, symbolism, and irony as some of the tools the author deploys to project the overall meaning and aesthetics of the work (<https://www.academia.edu>). It is, however, expedient to note that of all that has been reviewed, none of the works centre on the motif, dialectics, or ambivalences of migration and exile in the text, which is the preoccupation of this research.

Theoretical Framework: Trauma

Sigmund Freud, an Austrian psychologist, pioneered or initiated studies on repressed memories, which is dependent on the concept of the unconscious. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* published in 1900, Freud developed psychoanalysis, a form of therapy which aims at curing mental disorders by investigating the interaction of the conscious and unconscious elements in the mind. This, Freud achieved by getting the patient to talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears that cause the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining “buried” in the unconscious (Barry, 97). Freud’s later works that specifically hinged on trauma and its effect on the mind, the individual, and indeed the society include *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) (Baelev, 59). In these works, Freud posits that repressed memories correspond to actual events, rather than representing the patient’s desires and fantasies, and that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviour (Berger, 570). This seminal study on the effect of an overpowering or overwhelming event on the life of the individual laid the foundation for what is today known as trauma theory. After Freud, Cathy Caruth, Irene Visser, Dominick LaCapra, Kali Tal, Geoffrey Hartman, among others, advanced the frontiers of the trauma discourse, culminating in its canonization as a literary critical theory. This study pays predominant attention to Cathy Caruth’s model of the theory.

For Caruth, trauma is an experience so intensely painful that the mind is unable to process it normally. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth holds that in the immediate aftermath, the victim may totally forget the event and that if memories of it return, they are often non-verbal, and that the victim may not be able to describe them with words (61). Thus, for Caruth, the intensity of trauma is such that it is amnesic, unspeakable, and not directly available to consciousness. In Greek, the original or earlier meaning of the word trauma is wound – an injury inflicted on the body. In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most especially in Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the word trauma is portrayed as a wound inflicted upon the mind of the individual, and not the body (2). In most situations, the wound of the body is normally regarded as a simple and healable condition or event, depending, sometimes, on the degree or size, but the wound of the mind survives as a series of painful and recurring events “to which one is subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control” (Caruth, 2). Perhaps, what makes trauma a somewhat devastating wound is its recurring or repetitive nature, a tendency to linger, subsist or last, and not vanish easily, quite unlike a bodily wound that is bound to heal or dry up with time. Essentially, trauma studies categorically aims at examining, studying or analysing the behaviour and psychology of survivors of traumatic events or conditions such as wars, holocausts, violence, frustration, abuse, and other similar and sometimes near-death experiences (Cited in Micah Asukwo, 64).

Exilic Ambivalences in *Foreign Gods, Inc.*

Exile is an experience in ambivalences. It is characterised by unforeseen, unanticipated and profound uncertainties. Paul White conceptualises it as an outcome of tensions between the individual's desires and perceived, anticipated or hoped-for opportunities (1995:15). Like diffusion in the biological science, migration is a journey or movement from regions of *high concentration* to those of *low concentration*. By implication, it is a movement from areas or regions of high unemployment rate, high poverty level, or high social or economic instability to areas with little or relatively low rates of these conditions or experiences. From the perspective of First and Third-World dichotomy, migration, especially in the 20th and 21st centuries, is the movement of people from the developing Third-World nations to the technologically advanced and developed First World. It is a journey in search of survival, better quality of living or improved social status.

White (cited earlier) believes that migrants are open to new influences which pose a challenge to earlier self-perception. For him, it is through such challenges that the "compositional elements of multiple identities may be redefined" (1995:3). The implication, among others, is that some migrants try to add value to themselves by either enrolling in schools for further studies or learning some new skills or trade to enhance employability or adaptability to their new environment. However, in spite of efforts by migrants to add value to their already acquired know-how in anticipation of better, life-enhancing opportunities in their host land, they soon discover their status as aliens, exiles, the inferior and culpable 'Other', the stereotyped segment, or the never-assimilated ones. This is the experience of Ikechukwu Uzundu (Ike, for short), a Nigerian, who moves to the United States, qualitatively improves himself academically and graduates with flying colours only to be denied job opportunities because of some limitations imposed upon him by his status as an exile.

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming submits that to be colonial is to be in a state of exile and that the exile is always colonial by circumstances (quoted in Claire Alexander, 59). It is, thus, this state of exile – of dislocation or displacement and alienation – which forms the central theme of many a migrant writer. Okey Ndibe is one of those migrant writers who succinctly portray these experiences. *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, Ndibe's debut migration text, focuses on the experience of Ike, a Nigerian migrant in US whose overall dreams in life get shattered because no employer would grant him opportunity for a job offer as a result of his Nigerian accent apart from his non-possession of the US green card (*Foreign Gods, Inc.*, 13, henceforth, *FGI*). Ike attended the prestigious Amherst College, USA, graduated with distinction in Economics with the hope of securing a job in the corporate world. His expectations and dreams would, however, remain stillborn because of the aforementioned reasons. Ike's banter with Usman Wai, a friend and Sierra-Leonean migrant in the States reveals his overall impression about the United States, supposedly one of the most civilised nations in the world:

Yes, it's all about my accent! So the talk about opportunities – it is ridiculous...But I apply for a job and I'm excluded because of 'my accent', quote, unquote. It's worse than telling me outright I'm a foreigner, I don't belong. Then academics rush in to theorise me into an exile. That's why I refuse to wear that tag. (*FGI*, 55)

Ike does not seem to see any sense in the United States claiming to have made the world a global village through their technological prowess when they cannot tolerate or accommodate persons

of diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds in their domain. He expresses bewilderment about the much-acclaimed American civilisation when a first-class brain such as himself would be denied employment opportunities simply because of his accent. Usman, however, appears to be more conversant with the realities of exile than Ike. In spite of being an exile, he refuses to be furious about the fate of migrants in their host country even as he reminds Ike of other opportunities that abound in America apart from white-collar jobs. One of these vast opportunities, according to Usman, is cab driving (*FGI*, 9). He claims he makes a chunk of money weekly from the business and encourages Ike to also consider the trade, which, he believes, would yield him enough for sustenance. But Ike insists he would be more fulfilled or actualised if he could secure a white collar, corporate job, after all, that was why he went to school, studied hard and came out with flying colours. Unfortunately, this would only end a mere wish, a figment of Ike's fantasies given his status in his host country as an alien, the 'Other', or an exile. Perhaps, Salman Rushdie's postulation on exile as an experience in incompleteness, uncertainty, angst, loss, and un-fulfilment (Cited in Micah Asukwo, 195) may best be suitable to theorise Ike's dreams, which, rather than get fulfilled, end up a mirage.

Adjustment or adaptation for survival is one of the fundamental qualities and/or challenges of a migrant. Since their rights to insist on or protest against unjust situations are limited by their exilic status, what exiles do is to come to terms with the reality of the moment and make necessary adjustments for adaptation and survival. This is what Ike does after every effort at securing a corporate job hits the rock. He, like his friend, Usman, takes to cab driving, where he remains for good thirteen years (*FGI*, 13). Yet, Ike finds neither satisfaction nor fulfilment in the job. In a bid to have his dreams realised, Ike unwittingly falls in love with Bernita Gorbea, an American lady, marries her hurriedly just to enable him to qualify for the US green card, apparently one of the cardinal conditions for him to have a job. But no sooner had he married Bernita than his predicaments began afresh (*FGI*, 24-33). Apart from her amoral disposition as a nymphomaniac, Bernita's sauciness, insolence, ingratitude, and voraciousness make life unbearable for Ike, who, ordinarily, is a gentleman and a jolly good fellow. Ike is only able to gain some psychological balance when Bernita formally divorces him (*FGI*, 53-54).

Exiles are normally regarded or treated as aliens, foreigners, and the vulnerable 'Other' irrespective of the number of years they would have spent in their host land. The laws of the land take no cognisance of their feelings, expectations, interest or welfare. Instead, the laws tend to undermine their rights especially in events of litigation. Since they do not *belong*, whatever is administered to them as judgment is expected to be accepted hook, line and sinker or simply taken in good faith. Bernita, whose uncivil and wild disposition makes life a torment for Ike is the same person that rushes to court to file divorce papers in a bid to smartly claim alimony. As the duo of Ike and Bernita hire lawyers, what transpires in the court appears as if there is a kind of 'match-fixing' between Bernita's and Ike's lawyers. While Bernita's lawyer takes the centre stage as an "attack dog", Ike's lawyer takes the back seat as a mere "wimp" (*FGI*, 54). Ike's apt description of his lawyer as one whose hired job was to worship Benita's lawyer is borne out of that experience. He relates his pathetic and tear-inducing experience in the court to his friend, Usman Wai, thus:

Her attorney was this short woman with a quiet face. But when she opened her mouth – *phew!* The way she came after me, you would think I was a Manhattan millionaire...I think the judge found her lawyer

intimidating. Basically, the judge ruled that Bee should
walk away with my savings. (FGI, 54)

Ike's misery gets aggravated as he loses absolutely all that he had gathered in the past few years through cab driving to Bernita. Ike had thought that his marriage to the American lady was what his life was waiting for to be finally fulfilled in the United States. Little could he imagine that that action was going to turn out to be the very beginning of his predicaments and woes, his greatest undoing, his albatross.

Exiles are the vulnerable 'Other', persons whose disposition places them at the mercy of smart citizens who are always ready to cash in on their impuissance, innocence, and credulity to pull a fast one on them. Ike is quite desperate to have a green card, and the only easy way to possess it is to get married to an American lady. But in the absence of a ready lady for real marriage, there exist some middle men who 'arrange' marriages with some willing American ladies for a fee. This is how Ike's desperation for a green card takes him to Ricardo, a Puerto Rican, who in turn connects Yesenia, his twenty-two years old cousin, to Ike, as his "green-card" bride (FGI, 26). Unknown to Ike, Ricardo is a professional swindler who takes advantage of people's gullibility, particularly aliens, to enrich himself. He keeps defrauding Ike of his hard-earned money, promising to present Yesenia for the marriage formalities. The unsuspecting Ike does not also know that Yesenia herself is an accomplice in the whole saga. When Ike gets fed up with these lies and directly calls Yesenia to know about the state of things, her response becomes an eye-opener to Ike who has already been heavily duped. The denouement of the whole plot greatly enfeebles Ike as he weeps profusely and inconsolably for weeks and thereafter relocates from New York where he lived to a different part of the States altogether probably in a bid to emotionally and psychologically gather back his shattered pieces and move on (FGI, 27). Though frustrated and downcast, Ike has no choice but to accept the reality of his world – exile – which, for Said, is capable of leaving one in an unmitigated "solitude experienced outside the group" and a feeling of "incompleteness, angst, and un-fulfilment which creates in the mind of migrants a sense of deracination" (cited in Micah Asukwo, 199).

Exiles are usually victims of prejudice, racism, bigotry, and chauvinism in their host nations. They constitute the vulnerable, deprived, suspected and despised group. Their status as aliens engenders inferiority among their ranks. They are not regarded as full humans with fundamental or naturally endowed rights and privileges. They are at the mercy of their host country and citizens who dictate how they should be treated per time. Ike's untoward experience or ordeals in the United States prove this. The novel's protagonist would not marry the love of his life, Penny Rose, because he is an African. The father of the lady, Dr Earl Rose, had sent a strongly-worded letter to her daughter warning her of the colossal risks involved in accepting to marry an African who may one day "run off" with her to "some remote African village" (FGI, 25). On discovering this letter, Ike had no option but to play down on the love and plans he had for Penny in spite of the latter's bent on remaining in the relationship. After losing Penny to prejudice and racism, Ike now dates randomly, devoid of love, just to find a lady who would accept to marry him to enable him to acquire the green card. Ike now sees marriage as a game, a gamble, a contract, which may or may not stand the test of time, for, as the narrator puts it "a man chasing simultaneously after love and green card had to contend with the elusiveness of the ideal spouse" (FGI, 31). This is the desperation that drives Ike into Bernita, a desperado who wrecks his life within a short time and afterwards divorces him (FGI, 30-34).

Salman Rushdie believes that exile as a condition creates in the minds of migrants a sense of deracination, a sheer inability to reclaim the thing that was lost. Thus, for him, the hallmark of the experience of exile is the feeling of inadequacy and exasperation (172). Ike is indeed an epitome of this irritation. This is perhaps the reason why he falls prey to Jonathan Falla's weird idea or advice that he should sell his native community's old deity (*Ngene*) if he must banish poverty for life (*FGI*, 60-61). Jonathan Falla was Ike's friend while at Amherst College. It was him who first "sowed" in Ike the idea of "looting his people's ancient god, a war deity at a time bereft of wars" to make a fortune (*FGI*, 20). It was the same Falla who intimated Ike of a gallery called Foreign Gods, Inc., where the business of buying and selling of deities was fervently being carried out in the United States, and the need for the latter to visit the business centre to enable him to have first-hand knowledge of what he was talking about. Ike's decision to finally give in to this weird advice becomes his greatest undoing. Ike takes a colossal risk, travels to his village, Utonki, South East Nigeria, steals the deity and brings it to America. He, however, meets his unanticipated waterloo when Mark Gruels, the chief executive officer of the gallery, pulls a fast one on him, and offers him peanuts as the price of the deity (*FGI*, 318-324). Ike is unprecedentedly disappointed, frustrated and down-cast when he beholds the amount of money (a paltry Two Thousand Dollars) Gruels offers for the commodity in spite of all that he had spent in bringing the deity from Nigeria. It appears this is the greatest mistake of his entire life. For him, it is incredible, incomprehensible, and nightmarish. He cannot bring together his entire senses. The gloom that engulfs his entire being is overwhelming and indeed devastating. It would be safe to attribute Ike's woes to his status as an exile. Indeed, no amount of theorisation can adequately encompass the entirety of suffering that is inherent in living in exile (Zoran Samardzija, 180).

Post-Migration Trauma in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*

Trauma, Cathy Caruth believes, is an enigma of survival which ultimately creates the "illusion of never forgetting" in the mind of the survivor (53). For Caruth, therefore, what causes trauma is nothing but shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat "but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (61). On post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Caruth theorises that it is an overwhelming experience of a sudden or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs "in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrinsic phenomena" (58). It is, perhaps, in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* that the reality of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders as espoused by Caruth find copious expression.

Ike's trauma begins when he graduates from Amherst College as one of the best students only to find that he cannot secure a job in the corporate world because of his accent. He has attended a couple of interviews, performs creditably, but would not be hired (*FGI*, 13, 44). But amidst the joblessness, Ike is bombarded with series of letters from home requesting one form of assistance or the other. The letters are so many and regular that they become overly disturbing and somewhat tormenting (*FGI*, 44).

After waiting for some years without having a job, Ike takes to cab driving. But because of the need to acquire the US green card which is one of the cardinal prerequisites for securing a job in America, Ike dates American ladies almost randomly until he finds himself in the hands of Bernita Gorbea, whose presence in his life becomes one of his unforgettable nightmares. Bernita, according to Ike, is a lady that is hard to please or satisfy whether financially or emotionally. Her insatiability and gluttony in virtually every sphere of life is to Ike, not just

tormenting, but highly traumatic (*FGI*, 31-33). Prior to this time, however, Ricardo, a renowned fraudster had connived with Yesenia, an American lady who is also Ricardo's cousin, to swindle Ike of his hard-earned money under the pretext of presenting Yesenia to the former as his "green card bride" (*FGI*, 26). The rather anxious, desperate and credulous Ike had accepted the deal and paid Ricardo the agreed sum by instalments within a period of three months. Quite perplexing is the fact that all this happened when Ike was still a student at Amherst and doing menial jobs to make ends meet. Before he could discover that he was only a pawn in the hands of Yesenia and Ricardo, it was already too late. Naturally, of course, Ike breaks down and goes depressed for some time before gathering up himself together again (*FGI*, 25-27).

For Ike, cab driving would not bring him the much needed economic fulfilment. His stray into gambling may not be unconnected with this desire to make ends meet. Still finding it difficult to realise his economic dreams, Ike resolves to travel to his village, Utonki, to steal *Ngene*, the community's deity, to America, and sell it at a sum that would probably banish poverty in his entire life. He defies all known and unimaginable taboos, obstacles or barriers and finally carts away the deity to America. There, he sells the last of the Utonki people's deity to Mark Gruels, but the price the latter offers is so abysmally insignificant that upon reaching his house, Ike goes livid, woozy, depressed, and traumatised. The narrator captures Ike's sullen condition at this precarious moment thus:

He collapsed into the couch. A raw pain seared through him, and his bones creaked with sadness. In his head a swarm of emotions, a mangrove seeded with a riot of thoughts that thrashed this way and that. Idea after idea teased him, flirtatious, each as illusive and capricious as a streaking meteor, incandescent one moment, erased the next. And like the meteor, each idea's combustion was doomed to peter out. (*FGI*, 326)

The whole episode appears to Ike inconceivable, phantasmal and/or surreal. He can hardly come to grips with the idea of spending everything he had in his entire life going to the village amidst all the unimaginable risks to his life, only to bring the deity and sell at a price that does not even amount to the fare that took him there let alone the one that brought him back.

In spite of knowing the enormity of the risks and pains Ike might have undergone in an attempt to bring the deity from Nigeria, Gruels still places his cupidity far above the realm of rationality and common-sense. For Ike, sleep is now a luxury even as he is intensely miserable and traumatised. His dreams are wild and devastating. When he wakes up, his behaviour is a proof that he has lost touch with reality. In fact, the symptoms Ike later exhibits are, perhaps, those of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) in view of the fact that the response to the earlier, traumatic event has now found expression in the form of "uncontrolled, repetitive appearances of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena", in this case, the incessant, turbulent, and wild dreams (Caruth, 57-58). This hallucinating experience persists in the life of Ike to the extent that he no longer coordinates well enough to know how long it's been since he last transacted the business with Gruels, for, as the narrator puts it, he is "unsure how many days or weeks or months ago because he now counted time in the swarm of maggots" (*FGI*, 328). In real sense, the transaction between him and Gruels took place barely two weeks back. It is indeed safe to attribute all of Ike's woes to exile, after all, had Ike not been an exile, Mark Gruels would probably not have taken such an undue advantage of him – mindlessly cheating him in a way that unprecedentedly depresses him.

For Jean-Paul Sautre, the writer has a fundamental role to play for the evolution of a sane and progressive society, and so the function of the writer is to act in such a way that “nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it’s all about” (cited in Micah Asukwo, 57). This position is maintained by Romanus Egudu who posits that a writer is a “god-sent gadfly” to his society with a categorical mission to awaken it from its social, political, and economic slumber” (cited Micah Asukwo, 57). The writer is therefore imbued with the mandate, not only to educate society, which, of course, is its primary calling, but also to inform it of current developments and trends in the society that are capable of teaching some fundamental, invaluable, and didactic lessons. Unarguably, migration is one of the recurrent leitmotifs in contemporary literary discourse, and so, the need to enlighten prospective migrants, especially from Third-World climes, about its likely aftermaths, cannot be understated. This is what Okey Ndibe’s debut migrant fiction, *Foreign Gods, Inc.*, has accomplished.

Conclusion

Migration is a journey in search of the means of survival. It is a movement from an economically mismanaged, socially unstable, and prospect/opportunity-bereft clime to a somewhat stable, life-supporting, economically viable, and prospects-building one. Globally, migration has assumed an unprecedented dimension in recent times, catalysed by the apparent inequality in the world in which very many countries continue to look up to a few others for survival. From this context, migration may be defined as the movement of members of the developing Third-World countries to the developed nations in search of the means of livelihood. However, in spite of the dogged resolve to abandon the traditional homeland for a new, foreign one, Third-World migrants soon come to grasp with the ambivalences of exile occasioned by the fact of alienation, solitude, hostility, and trauma. This is the thrust of this paper which examined the dialectics, travails, and ambivalences of exile as inscribed in Okey Ndibe’s *Foreign Gods, Inc.* Thus, rather than offering the much anticipated reprieve, exile is a disillusioning, disenchanting, and disgusting experience characterised by rancour, angst, despondency and regrets. It is an experience in all-round displacement, hardship, angst, frustration, and loss.

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