

FRACTURED SELF: THE BURDEN OF IDENTITY CRISIS IN TOPE FOLARIN'S *A PARTICULAR KIND OF BLACKMAN*

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Abstract

The contemporary African diaspora has emerged as a significant area of study as African writers have increasingly turned their attention to the subject. Writers concerned with the formation of an African identity, shaped by a complex interplay of factors including cultural traditions and racial dynamics, have found the subject of diaspora worthy of literary representation. Such literary representations capture the experiences of Africans in the diaspora and their grappling with issues of identity, displacement, loss, hybridity, etc. This paper examines the burden of identity crises within the context of diaspora and the resulting fractured self in Tope Folarin's *A Particular Kind of Blackman* as it deliberates on the concepts of home and identity. Using the postcolonial approach, the paper assesses Folarin's handling of the diaspora experience with its attendant issues of identity and displacement. This paper also examines how individuals in the diaspora negotiate and construct their identity across racial lines in the context of a foreign society with its associated issues of racial discrimination. The study argues that, despite the challenges faced by the African diaspora, returning home and reconnecting with ancestral roots remain an even greater challenge, especially for second-generation immigrants born in the diaspora. Their complex hybrid status amplifies this difficulty. The paper concludes that diasporans experience social and psychological crises which facilitate the formation of new identities as they navigate existential realities in host lands. However, identifying and reconnecting with ancestral roots could proffer a solution to the psychological wandering and ambiguous views of home and identity that these individuals endure.

Keywords: Diaspora, identity, fractured self, postcolonialism, identity crisis

Introduction

Diaspora literature may be defined in terms of content and authorship. In terms of content, it depicts the experiences of people living outside their original homeland for political, economic, or social reasons. It addresses the issues and effects of the diaspora, centred on alienation, displacement, identity crisis, rootlessness, re-rooting, and racism. More often than not, authors of diaspora literature are themselves migrants, or at some point in their lives, lived outside their native lands. As such, diaspora literature is often understood as literary works by authors living outside their native lands. These writers live in foreign lands but cannot shed their connection to

their homelands; as such, their works often tell stories about their home countries. The content-based definition may be more useful in this work because it provides a clearer picture of the object of study. (Ojuola "Migration" 501; Kapoor 1)

The representation of Nigerians in the diaspora has become an important preoccupation in Nigerian literature, capturing the experiences of people abroad. Though diaspora experiences differ depending on when, how, and under what circumstances a migrant settle in a host environment, the common denominator is the fractured identity they grapple with as they remain caught between the culture of their host country and that of their native homeland. This creates

tension in their lives between two worlds: they feel connected to their homeland, which is invisible, and they also crave recognition in their new society. Salman Rushdie, though focusing on his experience as an Indian, captures a sentiment that every diaspora writer can identify with: "...our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short create fictions not actual cities or villages, but visible one, imaginary homelands, India of the mind" (76). Many diaspora writers, whether Asian or African, may find this reflective of their experience. The pictures of their homeland remain only in the recesses of their imagination, as they are caught up in the realities of a new society that leaves little room for them because they are different. However, they can recreate "imaginary homelands" in their literary works.

Most migrants face the desire to belong in relation to what they understand as their home and norms, but these realities may not be attainable. The concept of home may not necessarily mean what is typically known as the root or place of origin. It has been argued that it signifies "where the heart is". Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu in *The New African Diaspora* refer to this, in addition to an African saying, "Home is where you mend your roof". Home could significantly refer to where an individual considers home, irrespective of origin (25). However, for some writers like Equiano, who was forcefully taken off the African shore at the age of ten through the slave trade, still clings to his origin since at that time he was firmly British in residence and in cultural identity.

Significantly, African diaspora identity is the negotiation of multiple identities, including, but not limited to, African immigrants navigating the complexities of being biologically and socially African while residing in new spaces. This process often involves balancing the preservation of African values with integration into the host country's social fabric. The struggle for recognition, representation, and equal opportunities remains prevalent as Africans in the diaspora strive to overcome barriers and achieve social, economic and political relevance. The

experiences of diasporans in maintaining cultural ties while adapting to new environments highlight the fluidity and resilience inherent in identity formation. Hence, this paper examines Tope Folarin's literary portrayal of the diasporic experiences and identity crises from a postcolonial perspective.

Literature Review

Diaspora, Fractured Self and Belonging

Migration plays an integral role in the development of human societies and diaspora literature at large. This is because most societies are composed of people from different parts of the world who have moved, voluntarily or involuntarily, from one location to another for diverse reasons. (Kapoor 1; Holohan and Sirriyeh 1). Such movements have, in one way or another, led to significant development. There are the first-generation diaspora writers, individuals born in indigenous homelands who, by willful or unfortunate circumstances, migrate and settle in another country (Ojuola 1487; Saha 186). While many Nigerian diaspora writers were born in Nigeria and later migrated to other countries for various reasons, others are born to Nigerian parents in Europe or North America, maintain connections to their ancestral roots, and still experience cultural adaptation and acculturation. These are second-generation diaspora writers whose works have been predominantly published in the West and, as a result, have received greater recognition in Europe and America than at home in Nigeria. These literary works often depict the reasons for migration, the migrant experience, and how a unique blend of cultural influences has shaped their identities (Saha 194, Hall 224)

Nwiyi avers that "migration therefore seems to offer opportunities to change the diverse existential realities of our contemporary age and time, especially those that are debilitating" (192); this creates an opportunity for migrating individuals to change their quality of life or even the spaces and places they belong to, identify with and call 'home', usually for seemingly better reasons. Nicholas Van Hear views migration from the perspectives of two divisions: "the process, experience and dynamics of mobility and on the other hand, the outcome of migration such as the

integration, assimilation, segregation or exclusion of the people of migrant background and the changes in the society that may result” (34). Van Hear describes migration as a complex reality comprising the processes of movement and the realities of settling in foreign lands. According to Fatemeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour, “... the description of the migration experience and the difficulties of adaptation play a primary role in literature, actually migrant literature can be very diverse, either thematically or structurally” (686). Thus, some themes in diaspora literature reflect realities of migration, identity, belonging, dislocation, and displacement.

African Diasporas in new settlements are confronted with the question of their identity: “Who am I?” This question and the answers that come with it reveal that an individual could be considered different from others for reasons relating to skin colour, language, accent and more, thus creating an enabling environment for racism to thrive (Hall 225). In contemporary times, Africans in diaspora are confronted with discrimination and prejudice, which reflect the complexities of a globalised world (Hall 223). In fact, one of the most prominent subjects of contemporary discourse is identity. An African identity is the totality of experiences that celebrate African heritage. Africans in diaspora actively seek to reconnect with their African root, embracing traditional practices, languages, music, and art forms. This reconnection is often facilitated by technological advancements and greater access to information, enabling the preservation and promotion of African cultural traditions.

Rehman et al. assert that the fracturing of selfhood is at the core of the diasporic experience, in which living in Bhabha's "third space" splits the subject between conflicting cultural allegiances, creating not only creative possibilities but also a deeply fragmented self, suspended in ambivalence, confusion, and an unsolvable identity conflict, a self that belongs everywhere and nowhere (477). Thus, the fractured self of the diaspora subject is a permanent state rather than a departure from wholeness. As a result, identity in the diaspora is formed through rupture, continuously dismembered and reconstructed

across shifting cultural and emotional terrains, with agency emerging from the place of its ongoing fracture rather than from a position of restored selfhood (Biswas 245).

Furthermore, Tolulope Ojuola asserts that the diaspora is an ongoing process of cultural interchange and identity-building rather than merely a group of people living abroad. People who migrate or are displaced do not simply lose their culture; rather, they create hybrid identities by fusing it with the culture of their new surroundings. The tensions and opportunities of living between two or more worlds are reflected in literature, art, and other kinds of cultural expression that result from this blending, which is a continuous negotiation throughout generations rather than a one-time event. In this sense, the diaspora becomes a tale of inventiveness, resilience, and the ongoing reinvention of what it means to belong in a world without fixed cultural boundaries, as well as a tale of loss and displacement (1487). Biswas points out that:

The pressure of adapting to a new country can lead to a loss of self and identity, mental health issues, and even the desire to return home. Migrant narratives encompass stories of both voluntary and involuntary migration. Voluntary migration may be driven by personal needs or growth, the desire to join family members, or, in the case of return migration, a wish to reconnect with the ancestral homeland (243).

Hence, diasporic literature is significant in representing postcolonial realities such as identity, belonging, racism, dislocation, and hybridity. “Postcolonialism has... been used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies” (Ashcroft et al 213). The cultural, political and economic legacies of colonialism and imperialism, which underpin power imbalances, loss and underdevelopment in post-colonies, are interrogated through these writings. These historical antecedents have made it difficult to separate the subject of diaspora from postcolonial discourse and frameworks, given their potential to offer a nuanced lens for understanding these

phenomena and realities.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Postcolonial theory, a literary and critical discourse that evaluates texts according to their portrayal of colonial and postcolonial experiences as reflected in culture, language, identity, and social relations, serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. It emerged against this backdrop of cultural identities and the elevated voices of the marginalised. Within this framework, the concepts of identity and hybridity are emphasised because they shed light on the processes of fragmented selfhood that diasporic subject's experience, being fully connected to neither yet significantly impacted by both.

The paper draws on Stuart Hall's ideas on identity, the construction of a cultural identity and the dynamic processes of "being" and "becoming" of diasporic subjects. Stuart posits that:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity'. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (Hall 223).

Hall's position is used to examine the construction and re-construction of character's identities in the narrative. It also provides a framework for understanding the dynamic sense of self, one shaped by factors that continuously place a demand on, and define the identities of the diasporic subjects under study in the narrative.

Methodology

Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology, this study undertakes a critical textual analysis of Tope Folarin's *A Particular Kind of Black Man*, which depicts the protagonist's struggles with displacement, psychological negotiation, and fragmented identity formation through close reading.

The Fractured Self and The Diasporic Experience

Tope Folarin's *A Particular Kind of Black*

Man presents the experiences of Mr Akinola and his family. The Akinolas, who migrate to America in search of greener pastures, encounter America's racial landscape, which exposes the stark disconnect between the promise of migration and its lived reality. Although Mr Akinola works hard to realise his dreams, he never sees his American dream fulfilled, as he is confronted by the forces of racism that push him and his family to the fringes of society. His two children grow up in an environment that does not truly accept them, but rather makes them feel different. Thus, the novel depicts the systematic fracturing of the diasporic self, a process in which racial othering, cultural displacement, and the collapse of Mr Akinola's migrant aspirations converge to produce an identity crisis, psychological turmoil, and a desperate search for belonging in America.

Tunde, Akinola's oldest son and the novel's protagonist, has his first encounter with racial othering at school. He does not notice his difference in colour until his first appearance at school, and a white girl gazes at him in an unusual manner: "it was in her eyes. The way she looked at me made me feel like I was something scary and unknown. That is how I knew I was different. On the playground, all my classmates asked if they could touch my hair, and I said, "Okay. Then Simon rubbed my skin and ran away, crying to the playground attendant, "It won't come off..." (Folarin 30). His identity is revealed in the face of discrimination. Before this experience, Tunde apparently thought that he looked exactly like any other child until his real identity distinguished him. He then understands that he is different from others. As Frantz Fanon avers, "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world "(143). This experience begins Tunde's traumatic journey through a fractured self and consciousness of a racialised America, one that deepens as Tunde grows older and struggles to reinvent himself in different ways that are acceptable, enabling his assimilation and belonging in America. Yet, the gap deepens, causing a psychologically fractured identity and self to emerge.

Tunde's mother, Mrs Akinola on the other

hand undergoes significant psychological transformation as they move from a district in Utah to Bountiful. Mrs Akinola had thought of life in America as the ideal. Many African migrants perceive migration as an opportunity to obtain from other parts of the world, especially the world centres, what they have been unable to obtain in their home countries and peripheries. Thus, most European countries are considered goldmines, socioeconomically and politically safe havens. Nevertheless, upon her arrival in America, she is disappointed and lonely for being the only black woman among so many whites. All she sees are unfriendly white people. So, like Tunde, who now sees himself as stranger and has to deal with his 'strange skin' colour among other 'strange skins', Mrs Akinola also becomes conscious of America's racial order.

Folarin's focus on Mr Akinola's family's experiences whether the socioeconomic or psychological, project the dynamic forces that complicate the fracturing of the migrant's diasporic identity. When Akinola first arrived in America, he had bought a cowboy hat to wear in America, based on the image of America he formed in his mind from television shows. However, as he steps on the shores of America, he is "disappointed when he discovered that cowboy hats were no longer in style, and he sadly stowed his first American purchase, a brown ten-gallon hat that he bought during a layover in Houston, in his suitcase, and under his bed" (3). Akinola's investment in an imagined America is dismantled by the reality of the actual experience. As it turns out, the hat never comes out to see the light of day, and so it is with their dreams. They are packed and stored away from reality, far from fulfilment.

Folarin conveys disappointment, anger, and frustration through each character's personal experience: Mr Akinola, Tunde's mum, Mr Akinola's new wife, and Tunde. Mr Akinola goes from being student on scholarship to sweeping the streets, working as a mechanic, janitor, and security guard, all in an attempt to survive. Nevertheless, his struggles, together with an unstable identity and career, attest to a system that deliberately excludes him and his family from belonging because of their African identity and the

mean racial devaluation and dehumanisation that thrive in American society. As Tunde witnesses his father's struggles, he also attests to the burden of a complex identity, as realities that shape his own fragmented sense of self are handed down.

The psychological impact of the racial denigration the Akintolas suffer hits Tunde's mom hard with devastating results. Tunde observes that when she first arrived the United States,

Mom arrived in America expecting peace and love. She had fallen for the music of the Beatles and the Beach Boys as a high school student in Lagos, listening to the records her businessman father had brought back from his trip abroad. Though she had imagined a country where love conquered all, where black people and white people lived together in peace and harmony, Mom and Dad arrived instead in a place where there were no other black people for miles around, a place dominated by a religion they had never heard of before. (Folarin 3)

Their American dreams proved to be a mirage and Tunde's mother suffers a mental breakdown. Her experience highlights the harrowing effect of racism on the diasporic self. Thus, she goes from being a hopeful migrant to a raving woman who screams in schizophrenic fits. *A similar wave of disappointment affects* Akinola's second wife as she arrives in the States after his first wife leaves. Her first encounter at his apartment immediately initiates her into the migrants' school of disappointment. The apartment is not what she envisaged; her joy is cut short immediately, and she cannot pretend to be surprised by what is before her. She responds sharply to her husband's request to have a shower: "I will not be showering in this filthy apartment" (Folarin 47). This is a clear indication that Akinola is not yet living his American dream.

For Akinola, his early years in Nigeria were remarkable; he remembers how enthusiastic he was when he received the scholarship to study in Utah, and how he had hoped for a better opportunity to work in his field. However, since then, he has worked as a street sweeper, mechanic, janitor and a security guard. All of these were

menial jobs, and with his degree, he would be considered above them in his home country. Tunde says,

at first, each job seemed to present him with a host of possibilities, a chance to move up and make his mark, but then, inevitably, disappointment would follow. Sometimes he was laid off without explanation; other times, he quit because he was tired of being bullied. A threatening note left on his desk, an angry word flung at his face...but after a while, we could tell that he had stopped believing this himself (Folarin 54).

The disillusionment expressed in diaspora literature arises from the characters' inability to fully merge with or assimilate into the new host land. The expectation of achieving a better life or improved opportunities can be shattered by rejection. Virtually every migrant character is affected by the atmosphere of discrimination, racism and socioeconomic challenges.

Akinola is portrayed as a resilient individual who remains optimistic in the face of rejection and poverty. He hopes for a better tomorrow and the attainment of his American dream, even though that tomorrow never comes. He keeps hope alive as he encourages his children with soothing mantras such as, "life does not always go the way you want it to, but God always has a plan for us..." (Folarin 33). This reflects a recurring pattern among many African migrants.

As Takyi opines, "many Africans are attracted by the promises of a better living condition, the availability of jobs, educational opportunities and the possibility of social advancement in the United States and Europe" (22). These realities seem achievable to Akinola, yet he keeps changing jobs without achieving his aim. To avoid losing hope, he gives his children sermonised speeches, hoping they will understand, "I have big dreams for both of you; you guys are the only reason I am still here in this country. I should have left a long time ago, because I do not have any opportunities here. No one takes me seriously..." (Folarin 41). The situation confronting him is indeed hopeless, but the thought of retreating is far from him, as he hopes things may turn out differently for his children. He

struggles to pay his bills.

Things get worse for Akinola, who works very hard to make ends meet, yet still suffers because of his menial job. These conditions significantly affect Tunde's mother and soon degenerate into some form of psychosis as Mrs Akinola drifts into hallucinations and aggressive behaviour, attacking her husband and children. "Get the fuck out of here" (Folarin 5) she would yell at her children when they come to enquire what was wrong. Akinola gets his share of the traumatising experiences from his wife, "my father cowering on the floor, my mother standing imperiously over him. He took her punishment whenever she descended into one of her moods and afterwards, he would enter our room with a calm smile and tell us that mom wasn't feeling like herself..." (Folarin 5). Tunde's mother clearly declares to her family that, "I am too sick for this world, I won't be here for much longer" (19). She becomes literally sick and tired of the environment, and she resorts to pills to regain herself, yet her case continues to deteriorate.

She resents and hates her husband because he has brought her to the place where her hopes have been shattered. Moreover, she directs her anger at her son, Tunde, who closely resembles his father. In one of her rare moments of sanity, she tells Tunde, "I just want you to know that I do not hate you, I hate your father, I hate him for bringing me here, and I hate him for giving me hope (Folarin 20). This botched American dream makes the sick, having otherwise been a peaceful and loving mother. She feels sick, empty and lonely as life here begins to take a toll on her. She gradually drifts into schizophrenia and can no longer live with her family because of her aggressive tendencies. Fracture identity constitutes lack of one's true self-consciousness. This is evident when a character is not recognized and accepted in a new world and as such feels absent though present. Their identity is veiled as they see themselves through the lens of others. As a result many suffer the psychological impact of this reality just as Tunde's mother.

Nigeria becomes the only resort for her healing; she moves back home. When Tunde's mum returns to Nigeria, life takes a new turn as

Tunde's father remarries. However, Tunde still feels the void and a lack of connection with his environment. He does not seem to connect with everyone and everything. He begins talking with his grandmother back in Nigeria, asking her questions about his life and the hallucinations he begins to suffer. This, too, comes to an end when things get tough enough that his father's meagre income can no longer cover the cost of a long-distance call. Tunde and his family move again, this time to Dallas. Here, he meets with so many black folks as he has ever seen in his lifetime. However, as time goes on, his father's American dream begins to fade away as his second wife leaves him for another man.

Diaspora scholars often explore the dualities and complexities of diaspora identities, in which individuals negotiate their sense of belonging between their place of origin and their adopted homelands. Growing up in America is not strange for Tunde, since he was born there, unlike his parents, who migrated to the States from Nigeria. It feels normal; in his childish mind, he does not really see it as strange to be told that he will be a servant to a white woman when he goes to heaven (Folarin 10). He grows up living with 'strange' people who think he looks and speaks 'strangely'. His psychological development is altered as his thought patterns are distorted; he begins to see himself differently because of what he sees and hears around him. Soon, he also begins to hallucinate. Tunde lives a double life to the point that he no longer knows which version of himself is true. He says to himself,

I think something is wrong with me. I am not sure how to describe it. It has something to do with my imagination. The way things live in my mind...I also imagined what I wanted for the future. Impossible things that could never happen to a poor black kid like me. However, at night I would close my eyes and see myself graduating at the top of my class in high school..." (Folarin 100).

Identity crises and a quest for identity preoccupy Tunde's experience. Tunde is psychologically traumatised by the treatment he receives because of his looks and colour. This becomes his greatest

fear, so much so that he stops looking in the mirror because it only shows him something different from the 'colours' he sees around: "I feel this fear most acutely when I look in the mirror. The funny thing is that I avoided looking at mirrors for years because I was ashamed of the way I looked. Growing up as a dark-skinned kid in a series of all-white towns will do that to you." (Folarin 104). Du Bois posits that, "one ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,..."(3). Most often than not, diasporas are caught up in the web of an imposed identity and are daily reminded that they are different. This identity fracture creates a new consciousness in them.

To overcome the difficulties of racism and its effects on him and his family, Tunde studies different black men whom he believes have lived past the pressure of their colour and attained a status that enables them to mingle irrespective of their colour. "I studied the way that Sidney Poitier held his head when he spoke, tall, erect, and proud. I studied Hakeem Olajuwon's Walk, loping and graceful. I studied Bryant Grumbel, he always seemed so poised during interviews and sometimes after I finished watching him on TV, I would run to the bathroom and practice asking questions as if I were him" (Folarin 105). He is studying a particular kind of black man, one that he hopes to become someday (Folarin 105); the kind who has been able to overcome the challenge of being black in the land of the whites. Tunde loses connection as reality seems to diminish gradually before him. He questions the true existence of his mother and grandma, imagining them as aliens. He experiences a high level of dissatisfaction, not believing that the people who form part of his life exist, "... a part of me that was wondering if you actually exist..." (Folarin 129). Tunde explains his uncertainty to his grandma. He battles with his identity and feels helpless as he craves connection (Folarin 106). According to Du Bois,

the Negro is sort of the seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only

lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by a tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (9).

This clearly explains that the consciousness and identity of an African in the diaspora are shaped by dynamic forces, with white culture, perception and views on being at the top. This constitutes the major stumbling block for Akintola and his family, who suffer discrimination, racism and unnecessary marginalisation from the 'superior' race. Tunde, who was born in America and is thus an American citizen, is not exempt from this horrible reality.

Folarin shows Mr Akinola suffering greatly for being black. The things he endures serve as evidence that he is not who he thinks he is; he is different. At his place of work, Tunde says, "someone had drawn a picture of my father with his facial features greatly exaggerated, and blood dripping from the extra-wide nose. The drawing was meant to be a representation of my father, an effigy, but he said the thing actually resembles an evil monkey" (Folarin 53). This action is meant to spite Mr Akinola for being a black man, and there is no appropriate representation of him except that of a monkey. They succeed in doing more than that: They give him the impression that he does not belong. The sense of belonging for Akinola is altered and his hope of "becoming" is thin because his skin pigmentation and accent sells him out.

The complexity of racism and the significance of colour lines is one factor migrants have to grapple with as they interact and become aware of colour and the boundaries it can create in America. Akinola strives to be a source of encouragement for his children, but deep down, he no longer believes in himself. Thus, Tunde says, "dad was always telling us that things would be getting better soon, but after a while, we could tell that he had stopped believing this himself" (Folarin 54). He cannot fit into society. Fanon presents these realities as he posits that, "there is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: black men want to prove to white men at all cost, the richness of

their thought..." (12). He cannot move forward despite his hard work and the knowledge he has acquired because of his colour and Yoruba accent. Even after spending many years in America, people do not seem to understand Akintola when he speaks. Tunde reveals, "he told us, he had decided that his accent was preventing him from getting ahead" (Folarin 31). However, he keeps struggling "because he sounded like the popular stereotype of a modern male African" (Folarin 59). Akintola finds adjusting to the loss of cultural norms and religious customs, to changes in identity, and to the development of a new culture and a new concept of self.

Akinola's new line of business also does not change the status quo. He remains poor. Du Bois posits that "to be a poor man is hard but to be a poor man in the land of dollar is the very bottom of hardship" (12). Folarin seems to suggest that surviving as a black man in the United States is difficult. Tunde complains: "whenever I saw anybody, I knew I could tell from the way they looked at me that they still thought I was a loser. I mean, who was I trying to kid? My parents were still from Africa, I still had a weird name... a little ice-cream selling was not going to change any of that" (Folarin 77). These feelings of alienation remain, even as he speaks with the desired accent. Language proficiency does not change the fact that his skin colour is 'black' and that there are social implications of his black skin, which continue to mark him as different and subject to racial prejudice. This dissonance contributes to the development of an inferiority complex, as he begins to internalise feelings of inadequacy for being black/different. He confides in his grandma about the size of his nose, skin colour and other markers of an 'unusual' identity that deny him the ability to integrate and be accepted in America.

The story changes when Tunde meets and falls in love with Noelle, a black girl who seems to understand him far better than anyone else. She tries to help him find a way to overcome his sense of alienation and the identity crisis that plagues him. She makes him see the need to reconnect with his Nigerian roots, even though he is a second-generation immigrant in America. This return home serves as a springboard for Tunde's self-

discovery and recovery of his identity. A key feature of the diasporic experience is the challenging search for a sense of belonging. It is this search that eventually takes Tunde back to Nigeria in a quest to resolve his identity crisis and establish a sense of belonging for himself, amid the psychological turmoil caused by his inability to integrate into the society in which he was born, due to racial lines. The protagonist, Tunde, discovers that the observable differences in his skin colour, as well as those of other family members, significantly define their identities. These observed differences and their implications entail realities with social, economic and psychological dimensions. The study projects that, taken together, these realities complicate the mental and psychological state of the protagonist, his mother and father, who grapple with an unnerving sense of alienation that makes them appear schizophrenic. Return migration to Nigeria signals the beginning of a significant cure for Tunde's mother. This, in turn, inspires Tunde's complex adventure of tracing his roots as a second-generation immigrant and his eventual sense of belonging as a Nigerian.

Conclusion

This study isolates and projects two perspectives in the narrative of Africans in the diaspora: the lingering sense of alienation and disillusionment arising from immigrants' failure to realise their dreams. At the root of this alienation and disillusionment lies an identity crisis, largely fuelled by systemic racial discrimination. These social and psychological crises facilitate new modes of self-perception and the formation of new identities among immigrants as they navigate existential realities in host lands. The study argues that, despite the difficulties faced by Africans in the diaspora, returning home and reconnecting with ancestral roots remain an even greater challenge, especially for second-generation immigrants born in the diaspora. Although their complex hybrid status amplifies this difficulty, return migration could signify a significant 'cure' or relief for alienated diasporans who, after many years, still do not 'belong' to their host communities. The study, therefore, concludes that identifying and reconnecting with ancestral roots could offer a solution to the psychological wandering and ambiguous views of 'home' and identity that cause the fracturing of the self-experienced by African Diasporans.

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