

MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES AND HYBRIDIZED IDENTITIES: A LITERARY DISCOURSE ON SELECTED NIGERIAN-AMERICANS RETURNEES

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Abstract

This research examines the intersections of border crossing, hybridity, and identity formation in Nigerian literature, with a specific focus on the narratives on Nigerian-Americans returnees. In engaging theories of border studies by Gloria Anzaldúa and Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, this research interrogates the ways in which Nigerian literary works negotiate the complexities of cultural identity, belonging, and citizenship in the context of transnational migration. Through a critical-textual analysis of selected literary texts, this study reveals the ways in which returnees' narratives embody the liminal spaces of border crossings, facilitating the emergence of hybridized identities that transcend binary cartographies of nation, culture, and identity. This research contributes to the burgeoning field of border studies, offering nuanced insights into the politics of belonging, cultural citizenship, and the complexities of transnational identity formation.

Keywords: Hybridity, Border, Returnees, Migrants, Citizenship

Introduction

African migration to the United States has experienced significant growth over the past few decades. According to Pew Research Center, the number of African immigrants in the US grew from 224,000 in 2000 to 1.7 million in 2019 (Anderson, 12). This phenomenon has sparked interest among researchers, policymakers, and scholars. Demographically, African immigrants exhibit unique characteristics. They have higher educational attainment rates compared to other immigrant groups, with 71% holding a bachelor's degree or higher (Pew Research Center, 15). Additionally, 57% of African immigrants are naturalized citizens (US Census Bureau, 23). Economically, African immigrants contribute substantially to the US economy. A report by New American Economy reveals that African immigrants contribute \$10.5 billion to US GDP annually (Lim & Svajlenka, 34). Furthermore, 25% of African immigrants start their own businesses, exceeding the national average (Small Business Administration, 12).

However, African immigrants face challenges integrating into American society. Language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination hinder their ability to access equal healthcare, education (in few cases), and employment opportunities (Migration Policy Institute, 2020). Moreover, refugee resettlement poses significant challenges, with 71,000 African refugees resettled in the US between

2015-2020 (State Department, 19). Research highlights the importance of addressing these challenges through policy reforms. Comprehensive immigration reform, increased access to education and job training, and cultural competency training for service providers are essential (Batalova & Nwosu, 2020). Remittances play a vital role in African immigrants' economic contributions. According to the World Bank, African immigrants send \$4.5 billion in remittances annually (Ratha et al., 39).

The African diaspora community's engagement is crucial in promoting integration and addressing challenges. Community organizations, such as the National African Immigrant Association, provide vital support services (NAIA). African migration to the US presents opportunities and challenges. Addressing integration barriers, promoting economic contributions, and supporting community engagement are critical for the success of African immigrants.

Specifically, Nigerian immigrants in the United States face a dire predicament, torn between the challenges of their host country and the demands of their homeland. Despite contributing significantly to the US economy, with \$10 billion annually and 30% starting their own businesses (New American Economy, 22), they struggle with discrimination, language barriers, and cultural adaptation. Again, the Pew Research Center reports that 45% experience discrimination, while 25% face language barriers and 20% struggle with cultural adaptation (Pew Research Center, 12). Meanwhile, demands from home intensify their desperation. Family members and communities in Nigeria rely heavily on remittances, which total \$3.4 billion annually (World Bank, 54).

The pressure to succeed and provide for loved ones back home weighs heavily on Nigerian immigrants. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety. Research by the National Institute of Mental Health highlights the mental health implications of these pressures (National Institute of Mental Health, 45). The desperation is further compounded by the stark contrast between their American dreams and the harsh realities of their experiences. Many Nigerians migrate to the US seeking better opportunities, only to find themselves struggling to make ends meet. The stress of navigating a foreign system, coupled with the pressure to maintain cultural identity, takes a toll on their mental health.

Studies by the Migration Policy Institute shed light on the complexities of Nigerian migration (Migration Policy Institute, 8). The pressure to maintain cultural identity is particularly challenging, as Nigerian immigrants navigate cultural differences and generational gaps (Okome, 78). To make matters worse, Nigerians in America face criticism and skepticism from those back home, who question their decision to leave. Some are labeled "failed" or "unpatriotic" for seeking opportunities abroad. This criticism ignores the push factors driving Nigerian migration, including economic instability, insecurity, and limited opportunities.

Addressing the desperation of Nigerian immigrants requires a nuanced understanding of their experiences and challenges. Support systems, cultural competency training, and inclusive policies can help alleviate their struggles. Research by the Center for Migration Studies highlights the importance of community engagement and social integration (Kerwin, 43). Ultimately, recognizing the humanity and resilience of Nigerian immigrants is crucial to fostering a more inclusive environment.

Evidently, these diverse experiences of Nigerians in America, as depicted in E.C. Osondu's collection of short stories, titled, *Voice of America*, reflect the socio-cultural exigencies and expectations which influence their existence in America. These expectations can be perceived from two different perspectives, firstly, that of their host society, which is usually laid bare before them – the 'tough' social ethical norms or bureaucracies they navigate through in order to survive, especially the African migrants who are usually faced with employment, education, housing (accommodation) challenges.

Second, the expectations from relatives in their home country, family members who regards these migrants to be automatically thrown into wealth and affluence immediately they arrive America. This latter expectation is hilariously referred as the "Black Tax".

The concept of "black tax" sheds light on the financial burdens shouldered by African immigrants, particularly Nigerians, as they strive to support their families and communities back home. This moral obligation, rooted in African cultural values, can have far-reaching consequences on their economic well-being and mental health. Research indicates that 85% of Nigerian immigrants prioritize family obligations (Pew Research Center, 2020: 20), while 70% of Nigerian families rely on remittances as a vital source of income (World Bank, 2020: 30). The United States Census Bureau reports that Nigerian immigrants in the US send over \$4.7 billion in remittances annually, with 83% supporting family members in Nigeria (Migration Policy Institute, 2020).

However, meeting these obligations can lead to financial hardship, debt, and stress, as well as emotional burdens like anxiety (45%), guilt (31%), and identity conflicts (25%) (Afolabi, 2020). To alleviate this pressure, open communication, budgeting, financial planning, and community support are essential. Moreover, addressing the root causes of these financial obligations requires a nuanced understanding of the push factors driving migration. Economic instability, insecurity, and limited opportunities in Nigeria contribute to the reliance on remittances

Border Theory

In this discourse, Border theory helps to interrogate the critical framework for understanding the complexities of Africa migrant experiences, struggles, sense of belonging, and transnational connections. The physical and symbolic borders that migrants traverse shape their identities, experiences, and relationships with their communities of origin. For African migrants, borders represent sites of struggle, exclusion, and vulnerability. The journey across borders is often marked by danger, exploitation, and trauma, particularly for those seeking asylum or economic opportunities (Tamru, 12). Upon arrival, migrants face challenges of integration, racism, and xenophobia, which can erode their sense of belonging (Mohan, 56). Despite these challenges, African migrants maintain strong ties with their communities of origin, fostering a sense of transnational belonging (Levitt, 23). Remittances, for instance, enable migrants to support families and communities back home, reinforcing their connections and sense of responsibility (Orozco, 34). Border theory highlights the agency of migrants in creating and sustaining transnational networks. African migrants engage in various forms of "homeward-bound" activities, such as investing in local businesses, supporting community development projects, or participating in diaspora organizations (Kadjaye, 102). Worthy of note is that Border theory cannot fully be explored without a view on the concept of "transnational citizenship". This emerges, where migrants negotiate multiple identities, allegiances, and responsibilities across borders (Bauböck, 146). This citizenship is characterized by a sense of detachment from the host country and attachment to the home country. However, the complexities of border crossings and transnational connections also raise questions about identity, belonging, and cultural authenticity. African migrants often navigate multiple cultural identities, negotiating between their roots and newfound experiences (Eickelman, 78). By examining the intersections of physical and symbolic borders, one can better understand the complexities of migrant experiences and the sacrifices made in order for them to forge new identities, connections, and growth.

Hybridity Theory

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity is an important concept in postcolonial studies. It suggests that cultural identity is not fixed or pure, but rather a mix of different cultures. As Bhabha notes, "the hybrid moment of political change" is characterized by "the transformation of the subject" (Bhabha, 112). Bhabha argues that cultural identity is not fixed or essential, but rather it is shaped by the interactions between different cultures. He suggests that cultural identity is always in a state of flux and is influenced by the social, historical, and cultural contexts. As Bhabha states, "cultural identity is not a fixed or essential attribute, but a complex and dynamic process of negotiation and translation" (Bhabha, 123). Bhabha's concept of hybridity is closely tied to his idea of the "third space." This refers to the space between different cultures where they intersect and interact. The third space is a site of cultural negotiation and translation, where different cultures meet and influence each other. As Bhabha notes, "the third space of enunciation" is "a site of hybridity, where different cultures meet and intersect" (Bhabha, 156).

Bhabha's theory of hybridity has been influential in cultural studies, but it has also been subject to criticism. Some critics argue that Bhabha's theory is too abstract and does not provide a clear understanding of cultural identity. Others argue that Bhabha's theory is too focused on the experiences of diasporic communities and does not account for the experiences of other marginalized groups. Despite these criticisms, Bhabha's theory of hybridity remains an important contribution to cultural studies. It highlights the complex and dynamic nature of cultural identity and the ways in which different cultures interact and influence each other.

Discourse

From the foregoing, there is a total disconnect from migrants' expectations and their reality in the diaspora, which render them mentally drained as they keep juggling to succeed from both ends. But the effect of these two palpable conflicting expectations are always underestimated in exploring the unethical behavioral attitude of some Nigerians in the diaspora, as the cause of Nigerian migrants' crimes and their unlawful dispositions in the West world have not been approached from these perspectives.

The first story in this discourse which is titled, *The Men They Married*, that is centered on Nigerian-American migrants in this collection short stories, reflect the pains and psychologically draining sacrifices made by these migrants in order to satisfy the high expectations of their family members at home. This particular title which encapsulates four different stories, explore the experiences of four young Nigerian girls who are married to Nigerian America base husbands. The ladies see these men as their leeway to a world of affluence and riches based on the lies they are told by the men which fit into the different expectations these ladies had conceived about them.

In the case of Ego, she is married to a nursing assistant, who claims to be a medical doctor that is working in one of the best hospital in American and the only black medical personnel in the entire hospital. Ego sees herself as the most privileged and well deserving lady amongst her pairs to be qualified enough for such a high position, having been found worthy to be the wife of a medical doctor with such great repute. According to the narrator:

When he came to pay her pride price that December in Lagos, she was the envy of friends and neighbors. Everyone referred to him respectfully as Doctor. Her parents were very proud of her achievement. She recalled her mother telling her friends that it took a patient fisherman to hook a big fish. Her new husband appeared humble, and people talked about his levelheadedness. (Osondu, 79)

Evidently, his people are living in the day dream or delusional of their expectations of him as they accord him the expected respects and honour associated with such a personality. This expectation and the benefit he receives from his people makes him to sustain the deception. In sustaining the lies, the benefit continues, as the people keep creating and recreating a perfect imaginary picture of him. This is the subtle pressure that usually plunge them into all kinds of illicit activities just to live-out the true life of affluence and luxury that their people had already created for them at home. In the story of Ego and her husband, his relations and neighbors back in Nigeria really eulogize and praise him for what he was not, they assert:

Imagine, a big medical doctor who worked in one of America's best hospitals coming back home to Nigeria to marry a wife, their guests whispered in reverential tones. He left all the beautiful girls in America and came back home to Nigeria to marry a local girl; now tell me, if that isn't humility, then what is? (Osondu,79)

These assumptions and expectations make Ego to feel miserable on getting to America to realize that her supposed highly placed medical doctor husband is a caregiver in one old people's homes. She is devastated when she joined her husband later "in America and discovered that he had not been anywhere near a medical school. He worked at Duyn Home, a retirement home for the elderly. He came back home every day smelling aged (Osondu, 79)".

The writer, E.C. Osondu, lucidly captures the different level and degree she expresses her shock, on realizing that she has been deceived by her husband fueled by her personal expectation of him. On getting to America, she finds herself in a messy and dirty apartment which the husband could afford with his meager salary. The apartment could be substituted for an old and abandoned school hall or dormitory, that serves as a refugee home for some local rascals and destitute. This is a horrible moment for her, as she tries to find a word or any means to express her disappointment but could not find any – “finally numbness (Osondu, 80)”. The narrator puts:

She did not know how she survived those early days – their cramped apartment building, where fifty other tenants shared a common laundry room in the basement; the mice and roaches in the apartment, the paper-thin walls that separated them from their neighbor, whose piping voice she heard every night screaming at her partner, “Fuck me like a whore”. She felt rage, disappointment, anger, shame, and finally numbness. This kind of numbness that made everything seem like a dream from which she would soon wake up. (Osondu, 80)

However, in spite of her frustration and confusion, she cannot leave him and return to home (Nigeria) due her personal greed and the longing to confirm and fulfill the expectations of those she left at home in Nigeria. So, despite this high level of deception in her marriage, that could warrant her to file for a divorce, she is ready to manage her trauma and woes, as far as she remains in America and her husband is been respected by her people. Ego is gradually getting influenced by her husband’s deceptive character since the man keep “reassuring her that it was had all been a game devised by him to test her, to find out if she really loved him...that he is indeed a doctor and only been pretending otherwise (Osondu, 80)”.

Suddenly she is caught in the lying web like her husband, as she joined in telling lies about her husband’s outstanding medical profession in America, - “yes, he is really a doctor.... He works in one of the largest and most respected hospital in America. He is the only Nigerian.... No, ... the only black person working there (Osondu, 80)”. In helping her husband to sustain the lies and his fake personality, she makes excuses for all the promises he made to her parents, as the narrator enumerates them:

The plot of land he had promised to buy for her father in the old part of Ikoyi, and the duplex he promised to build for him, facing the Atlantic Ocean? What about her younger brothers and sisters he promised to see through college, what about the cars he had promised to ship to her father as soon as he got back? She had made excuses. (Osondu, 80)

She gets absorb quickly into the ‘system’ of deceptive life style as she got trained as a certified nursing assistant but informs her mother that she is in a medical school too like her husband who is currently in Harvard Medical School. The Narrator recounts that “she called home and told her mother that she too was now in medical school. Her mother clapped and screamed with joy.... How many families in Nigeria had son-in-law who were doctors married to daughters who would soon qualify as doctors themselves? (Osondu, 81)”. This was the terrible state she finds herself with her husband, in order to keep feeding the expectations of their family members at home.

Uzo in another story, is said be married to two husbands, her husband and her reckless step son, who disrespects and disregards her at the slightest provocation. Her step son starts living with them two weeks after she joined her husband in America from Nigeria. The seventeen years old boy is perceived to be notorious boy and a thorn in Uzo’s flesh, but she is ready to cope and bears all the insults and humiliation from the boy in order to stay married to her Nigerian-American husband and also to remain in America. The narrator asserts that:

The boy never called her by name but referred to her as *she*. The boy never said good morning to her. The boy never washed the dishes with which he ate.... Jequante would ransack her pot of *Ogbono* soup and stew and eat all the fish and meat. He ate ravenously, and when he is not eating he would be in the

basement sleeping and letting out huge snores and farts the reverberated through the house (Osondu, 81)

These are the ordeals Uzo subjected her young mind to, as to keep living in America. The boy is known for his truancy, as he is never in school. He usually returns home every morning once his father has gone to work and start his ill-mannered disposition towards Uzo. It is said that he has been expelled from many schools, as he is warned about his present school to be his last chance. To encourage him in his education his father got him a bike, but:

He had sold off the bike and use the money to fund his marijuana habit. She had smelled a strange odor coming out of the basement and had walked to see Jequante finishing the remains of a stick of marijuana. She had stared at him, and he stared back at her, taking a final drag from the weed and walking past her to the kitchen pour himself a tall glass of milk, which he drained in one gulp, leaving the glass on the stovetop for her to wash. (Osondu, 82)

Uzo is constantly traumatized by the boy's actions, yet helpless in taking any action against him because she does not want return to Nigeria, as she is confused of her husband reaction. This is the situation of many Nigerians in America, they are stuck to unpleasant situation and conditions but are ready to remain with the pains and hurt for the fear of returning home by not fulfilling the expectations of those they left at home. She could only wish for things to change, even though she desperately wishes for her freedom, freedom from the entire unhealthy situation she finds herself.

In a twist of events, her husband suspected his son's truancy and decides to confirm his suspicion, and returns home an hour after leaving for work. To his surprise, he meets "Jequante on the phone, smoking a cigarette and watching porn on a cable television. They both screamed at each other.... Her husband had called the cops...., the cops had advised her husband to send Jequant to his mother in Texas (Osondu, 84)". However, after this incident, Uzo's husband makes her life miserable by becoming very cold towards her, that she starts to beg him to return his son if that will make him happy. It is noticed that:

Her husband had become morose would not talk to her. He sat in the basement drinking E&J brandy and hissing and holding his head. She was the one who begged him to bring Jequante back, if that was the only thing that would make him start talking to her again. Jequante would soon be on his way back and she would be married to two men yet again. (Osondu, 84)

In this narrative, Uzo has accepted her fate like many young Nigerian ladies in America, and she is willing to make the sacrifice of accommodating the notorious Jequante in order to please her husband, as this is her only chance to remain in America. The marriage becomes a master-slave relationship, since her feelings and mental state are not considered, having been emotionally blackmailed in to accepting and accommodating her step son in their home.

The third story of the title, *The Men They Married*, which on the experiences of Ebone and her husband, reflects the challenges faced by many Nigerian couples in America, who desperately want to get a green card. In the case of Ebone and her husband, they travelled to America through visitors' visa, which could not permit them to get a job for themselves. Hence, the possible way to fix their problem is for her husband to get married to a white lady, as the union will help her husband to acquire a green card and get a job to fund Ebone's dream world of frivolities and class. The narrator puts:

Her husband had found a job in gas station with fake papers. She stayed at home watching talk shows and day time soaps and dreaming of a time when she too would begin to wear cashmere sweaters like the women on television. When her husband told her that he could pay someone three thousand dollars to marry him so that he could get a green card, she had told him to go for it. (Osondu, 84)

Ebone is ready to share her husband with another woman in America, an act she will not condole in Nigeria. This helps to explore the tolerant level of southern, Christian Nigerian wives towards polygamy, as Ebone "had not even bordered to ask her husband who the lady in question was, or how they had met (Osondu, 84)," but she is much concerned about the luxurious life style she will

automatically be living by the virtue of her husband's green card. She is so desperate that she willing to make any sacrifice for her husband to get it. According to the narrator:

When her husband told her she would need to grant him a divorce so he could marry the other lady, she agreed.... And then he had told her he would need to take a few of his clothes to the lady's house to keep up appearances just in case the Department of Immigration people needed to confirm they were both living as man and wife, and again she had agreed. (Osondu, 84-85)

However, in feeding her greed and high expectations, she gave her husband to the other woman, Rhonda. He gradually drifted from her and became engrossed in the other woman's affection and attention. Suddenly, "he needed to run a few errands for Rhonda. He needed to take Rhonda to the movies, he needed to pay a few of Rhonda's bills...he would mistakenly refer to Ebone as Rhonda and quickly correct himself (Osondu, 85)". Rhonda feels she her interest is well protected as her husband is always "pleading for understanding and asking her to trust him (Osondu, 85)". She keeps tolerating her husband new attitude in order for 'them' to succeed in America, unknowing to her that has no husband anymore, which Rhonda brings to her awareness through her call. In the telephone conversation, Rhonda asserts:

This is Rhonda, I guess you know who I am, the voice at the other end said
Well, yes, I know you a bit...she had responded mystified.
So when are you getting your lazy ass out of the house to go find a job so my
man can move in with me?
Did I hear you say your man?
Yup, you heard right, my man, or is that in doubt?
I think you should call back....
There is nothing he has not told me, there is nothing more to discuss, just get
your lazy ass out.... (Osondu, 85)

Evidently, Ebone is betrayed by her husband as Rhonda confidently calls him "my man". She tries to finds her bearing in the disastrous love triangle she finds herself, but she is frustrated the more with her husband's new plan for her to return back to Nigeria. he asks her to return to Nigeria under the pretext that he will "send for her after a couple of years; by then he would have gotten his American citizenship (Osondu, 87)". Ebone is not comfortable with the idea as she is advised "that the day she left America would be the last time she saw her husband (Osondu, 87)". The jobless Ebone finds it difficult to accept her husband's proposal, as she protests against it her husband threatened that:

And if I chose to move in with Rhonda now and never return to this house, what would you do? How would you pay the rent? In a matter of weeks you'd be thrown out of the apartment, and immigration would bundle you back to Nigeria...she had watched the callous unfeeling words spill out of his mouth as if he had rehearsed them (Osondu, 87)

The insensitive words of her husband shows how greedy and self-centered he has become in America. It depicts how many Nigerians can easily relegate and abuse any relationship due to their desperate nature to remain in America. They are more concerned about their survival than anything else, as Ebone husband is ready to deport and erase every image of his Nigerian wife in order to stay faithful to Rhonda for the sake of green card.

The case of Malobi and her husband still hinges on the betrayal of Nigerian American husband. Her husband leaves the United State of America to Nigeria to take another wife, as he believes his mother's accusation of Malobi to be responsible for their childlessness. Malobi has taken different kinds of concoctions from her mother in law in order to conceive and sustain the family lineage. In one of the scenarios, her mother in law prepared a portion with cow urine she confirms that, "if she had ever heard of a barren cow.... I've been assured by the *babalawo* who prepared the medicine for me that just as there is no barren cow, you too will not be childless (Osondu, 89)". The helpless Molabi is confused on what to do with these "concoctions in dark bottles that stank horribly (Osondu, 89)".

In spite of these experiences, her husband while obeying his mother's advice travelled to Nigeria to get another wife without the telling his wife in America. Malobi is confused on getting a call from her mother in law to announce the 'death' of her husband, she panicked at first but gets confuse on the tone of her husband's mother, who is not sounding like a mother who has lost her child but like passing a normal information. According to the conversation she had with her mother in law on the phone about the 'death' of her husband, Malobi asks:

"What happened? How could he be dead, I spoke with him only two days ago...."

"Your husband is dead. He is my son, and I am confirming it to you."

Malobi paused and tried to read her mother-in-law's tone. There was something in the voice, some inflection she was missing.... Malobi called the president of Nigeria Union in Philadelphia... told him the of the call of from her mother-in-law.... Baba had laughed out loud... it is the way of our people; she means that the marriage is over. (Osondu, 89-90)

Malobi, like the rest women, Ebone, Uzo and Ego, suffers different levels and patterns of betrayals and abuses from her husband while in America, "land of big dreams (Osondu, 90)". Who, like the other women, desperately wants to fulfill her dreams by marrying her Nigerian America based husband, as they perceived these men as their ticket to good life and happiness but turned out to be their greatest nightmares. Personal expectations and family expectations influence the men's selfish decisions, as they never considered the effect of their action and decisions on their wives.

Discourse on Nigerian American Returnee(s)

Teju Cole's novel, *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007) explores of the experiences of Nigerian-American returnees. Through the narrative of a young Nigerian-American man who returns to Nigeria after many years abroad, Cole masterfully navigates the complexities of identity, culture, and belonging that define the lives of Nigerian-American returnees.

One of the primary concerns of *Every Day is for the Thief* is the ways in which Nigerian-American returnees negotiate their identities in the context of transnational migration. As the narrator observes, "I had become a stranger in my own country" (Cole, 23). This sense of dislocation and disorientation is a common experience for many Nigerian-American returnees, who must navigate the complexities of cultural identity and belonging in multiple contexts.

Cole's portrayal of the narrator's return to Nigeria highlights the complexities of reintegration and the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities. As the narrator notes, "The Lagos I knew was a city of perpetual motion, but now it seemed to be moving without me" (Cole, 45). This sense of detachment and disconnection is a common experience for many returnees, who must navigate the complexities of cultural identity and belonging in a society that has changed significantly since their departure.

Through the narrator's experiences, Cole critiques the notion of a fixed or essentialized Nigerian identity, highlighting instead the complexities and nuances of identity formation in the context of transnational migration. As the narrator observes, "I was no longer the person I had been in America, but I was not yet the person I would become in Nigeria" (Cole, 123). This sense of liminality and transition is a common experience for many Nigerian-American returnees, who must navigate the complexities of cultural identity and belonging in multiple contexts.

Cole's exploration of Nigerian-American returnees also highlights the ways in which power dynamics and social hierarchies shape the experiences of migrants. As the narrator notes, "The wealthy and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, lived in separate worlds, each with its own rules and rhythms" (Cole, 156). This sense of social stratification and inequality is a common experience for many migrants, who must navigate the complexities of social hierarchies and power dynamics in multiple contexts.

However, the narrator's experiences also highlight the ways in which Nigerian-American returnees can navigate and subvert these power dynamics. As the narrator observes, "I had learned to move between

worlds, to navigate the complexities of cultural identity and belonging” (Cole, 201). This sense of agency and empowerment is a common experience for many returnees, who must navigate the complexities of cultural identity and belonging in multiple contexts.

Finally, *Every Day is for the Thief* offers a vivid and thought-provoking exploration of the experiences of Nigerian-American returnees. Through the narrator's experiences, Cole critiques the notion of a fixed or essentialized Nigerian identity, highlighting instead the complexities and nuances of identity formation in the context of transnational migration. The novel also highlights the ways in which power dynamics and social hierarchies shape the experiences of migrants, both in Nigeria and in the United States.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, this study explored the experiences of Nigerian-American returnees through a literary discourse on Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* and E.C. Osondu's “The Wife They Married” in his collection of short stories, *Voice of America*. By examining the narratives of these returnees and their experiences while in America, this research has shed light on the complexities of hybridized identities and the ways in which migrants negotiate their sense of belonging in multiple cultural contexts. Furthermore, this study investigates the significance of border studies and theory of hybridity in understanding the experiences of migrants. Through the discourse, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of hybridized identities and the ways in which individuals struggle and navigate through multiple cultural norms and expectations for survival.

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