

**LEAVING THE HARMATTAN: A CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF DIASPORIC
EXPERIENCES THROUGH SHORT STORIES**

By ©Chinweolu Obioma Nzekwe. A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Applied Literary Arts

Memorial University of Newfoundland

October 2025

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Abstract

This thesis is a creative project that contributes to diasporic literature by exploring themes of cross-cultural exchange, climate change, and co-existence through a collection of short stories and prose poems. Set primarily in two culturally and climatically distinct locations, the stories feature a diverse range of characters differing in age, experience, background, and mindset. Through their interactions and journeys, the work highlights the complexities of migration.

Although many writers and scholars have addressed this subject, there remains a need for continued exploration. Drawing from my lived experience of moving from Nigeria to Canada, augmented by imagination and the influence of existing scholarly and creative works, this project amplifies existing discourse, sheds new light on migration-related issues, and contributes to diasporic literature. It incorporates a range of literary techniques, including both prose and poetry devices, and presents stories through a distinct narrative voice.

In conclusion, this thesis emphasises the complexities of migration and advocates for co-existence, mutual respect, and appreciation of cultural differences as essential approaches to overcoming the challenges of cross-cultural encounters.

General Summary

This thesis is a creative project consisting of a collection of twelve short stories and prose poems that explore themes of culture, climate change, and migration. Set in two distinct locations with contrasting climates and cultures, the collection features diverse characters, each offering a unique perspective on the experience of migration. It draws on both fictional and non-fictional elements to depict the everyday realities of migrants. Through a variety of themes and literary styles, the collection aims to present multiple viewpoints and deepen the reader's understanding of migration.

The narrative journey begins in Nigeria and gradually transitions to Canada, vividly portraying the experiences of immigrants as they adapt to new environments. In today's global context, this creative work is especially relevant, as it promotes cross-cultural understanding and encourages coexistence in multicultural societies like Canada. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to the building of a more inclusive and egalitarian community.

Acknowledgements

It has been months of studying, researching, and writing this thesis, and none of it would have been possible without the support and encouragement of many people.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor and instructor, Dr. Adam Beardsworth, for his teachings, suggestions, corrections, and encouragement. Your detailed feedback and constructive criticism were invaluable to the completion of this project.

I am also grateful to everyone at the School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, for their help, support, and the baseline funding that sustained me throughout my studies.

I would like to acknowledge everyone in the Master of Applied Literary Arts program, especially our program coordinator, Dr. Shoshannah Ganz, for her valuable guidance throughout my studies. I am equally thankful to my instructors: Dr. Tom Halford, Crystal Rose, Prof. Aly Waterman, and Shelly Kawaja. Your teachings and insightful feedback were instrumental in preparing me for this thesis. Thanks also to my classmates, your questions, suggestions, and contributions helped make this project a success.

In addition, I deeply appreciate the support from my family and friends. To my sister, Chinyere Nancy Nzekwe *Ada di mma*, who ignited the desire in me to pursue this degree, thank you. To my parents and siblings *Ndi o ga-adili mma*, thank you for your prayers and for standing by me when the journey became tough.

Finally, I could not have completed this thesis without the help of God Almighty. Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who calmed my mind in times of confusion and encouraged me to press on. Thank you, all!

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| General Summary | iii |
| Acknowledgement | iv |
| Table of Contents | v |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | |
| 1.1 Comprehensive Review of Relevant Literature | |
| 1.1.1 Introduction to the Review of Relevant Literature | 1 |
| 1.1.2 Literature Review | 3 |
| 1.1.3 Conclusion | 11 |
| 1.2 Relevance of the thesis to Applied Literary Arts | 12 |
| 1.3 Objectives of the thesis | 14 |
| 1.4 Overview of the sections and stories | 15 |
| Chapter 2: Short Stories | |
| 2.1 Egbe bere Ugo bere | 19 |
| 2.2 The place | 21 |
| 2.3 The city on a hill | 21 |
| 2.4 Man in the Rain | 21 |
| 2.5 White Dust | 25 |
| 2.6 Leaving the Harmattan | 26 |
| 2.7 Cold Ashes | 34 |
| 2.8 Night in the Daytime | 39 |
| 2.9 What do you see? | 47 |

| | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|----|
| 2.10 | A Closer Meeting | 51 |
| 2.11 | The Oldest Person I have Met | 55 |
| 2.12 | Closer to the Ocean | 58 |
| Chapter 3: Summary | | 64 |
| Works Cited | | 65 |

Chapter 1

Introduction

The literature of migration written either by local or foreign writers is meant to create a cultural local environment with a view to other socio-cultural surroundings: either about citizens who travel and find a home abroad or about foreign citizens who travel and take root in the country.

(Monica Manolachi 164)

1.1.1 Introduction to the Review of Relevant Literature

Consistent with diasporic literature, the thesis is set in two different countries and continents: Nigeria in Africa and Canada in North America. Nigeria, located in sub-Saharan Africa, is the most populous country on the continent, with over 200 million people representing diverse cultures, religions, and ideologies. Its population is predominantly Black and consists of more than 200 ethnic groups, with the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba regarded as the major ones due to their larger populations. While each ethnic group speaks its own language, English, an inheritance from Nigeria's colonial history with Great Britain, serves as the official language. These diverse cultures and influences together shape what may be described as Nigeria's multicultural identity.

Canada, on the other hand, is a North American country with a population of over 40 million people from diverse backgrounds, beliefs, races, and cultures, with Caucasians forming the majority. Its multicultural character is shaped by the influence of Indigenous peoples, French and British colonial histories, its proximity to the United States, and a steadily growing immigrant population. Canada has two official languages, English and French, while Indigenous languages and numerous immigrant languages are also widely spoken across different regions. This cultural

diversity and multicultural way of life have made Canada an attractive destination for migrants from around the world, including Nigerians.

With the surge in global migration and Canada emerging as one of the preferred destinations for immigrants, the country has increasingly attracted Nigerians seeking better opportunities in education, careers, livelihoods, security, refuge, or simply the chance to relocate. According to Ibukunoluwa and Sinacore, quoting Statistics Canada, “African immigrants represented 14% of the permanent residents who arrived in Canada between 2015 and 2019, and 74% of these African immigrants came from sub-Saharan African countries, which have predominantly Black populations” (2). A subsequent 2021 report by Statistics Canada further indicates that a significant number of immigrants from the Sub-Saharan region came from Nigeria. With the growing presence of Nigerians in Canada, there has been a corresponding increase in scholarly and creative works portraying their experiences.

These writings highlight the challenges of adapting to a new culture while reaffirming that storytelling serves as a powerful medium for exploring the complexities of cross-cultural experiences, particularly in the context of migration. In both fiction and non-fiction, these writers provide creative and critical insights into themes such as place and displacement, climate change, cultural dislocation, identity crises, xenophobia, and the struggle for belonging. These narratives are “rich with stories of ongoing journeys, destinations and returns, of wanderlust and the co-existence of multiple identity narratives” (Kumar et al. 3). This review examines how storytelling functions as a vehicle for cross-cultural exchange by exploring the works of notable Nigerian writers.

1.1.2 Literature Review

Human migration has persisted for centuries and continues to the present day. Factors such as war, political instability, poverty, economic recession, and the increasing desire for better opportunities, whether economic or educational, have all contributed to the rise in migration in the last two decades. As Michael Clair notes in his book, “Immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador: How it Works, How it Worked and How it Might Work,” that “It is in the nature of human beings to move, be it across town into a new home, to another town to study, or even to another country to work. Human migration has been going on for as long as there have been humans (17).

These movements have not gone unnoticed by artists, especially literary artists, who create stories that capture the experiences of migrants. The literary works that emerge from these experiences have been labelled in various ways, including migratory literature, diasporic literature, expatriate literature, and transnational literature, among others. These stories are often set in two locations, or primarily in one place with occasional references to another. Typically, the main character is a migrant who has lived in both places, allowing them to reflect on the complexities of belonging and identity.

In describing such characters, Agnew et al., in the book *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*, explain that,

The diasporic individual often has a double consciousness, a privileged knowledge and perspective that is consonant with postmodernity and globalisation. The dual or paradoxical nature of diasporic consciousness is one that is caught between 'here' and 'there,' or between those who share roots, and is shaped through multilocality. The consciousness and identity of diasporic individuals may focus on their attachment to the

symbols of their ethnicity, and they may continue to feel emotionally invested in the 'homeland.' Yet such attachments and sentiments are experienced simultaneously with their involvement and participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political allegiances to their homes in the diaspora. (14)

The complexity of migrant identities is shaped or influenced by differences in culture, ideologies, and norms between the place left behind and the new environment. These differences are evident in language, social behaviour, laws, interactions, festivals, clothing, food, religion, and more. In societies that experience immigration from diverse cultures and backgrounds, cross-cultural exchange is inevitable. Moreover, as these cultures interact, Niedenthal et al. note that the “intergroup contact can disrupt the practices and norms of individual cultures” (562).

These cultural changes can be embraced and accommodated through efforts to understand different cultures, respect their differences, and acknowledge shared similarities. However, they can also be met with resistance by the parties involved: immigrants and natives. Also, as cultures interact, they may blend, leading to the emergence of new, hybrid cultures. Niedenthal et al. note that the growing diversity resulting from recent immigration “should be seen as the very beginning of the push toward adaptive cultural shifts, not the end. Indeed, the ancestral diversity of any given country is constantly evolving” (569). This suggests that cultural evolution is an ongoing process driven by global migration. These changes affect both host societies and immigrants, often resulting in cultural hybridity and, at times, identity crises for migrants as they navigate multiple cultural identities.

Kumar observed that migratory stories often emerge from the personal and familial struggles of individuals striving to build a new life far from their original homes. In the process of adapting to a new environment, these individuals frequently navigate the interaction between two

cultures, the culture of their homeland and that of their destination. Scholarly studies have highlighted the significance of migratory narratives, particularly to cross-cultural exchange (Manolachi 164; Murphy 99) and the lived experiences of migrants (Banda 102). These academic insights are echoed in the creative works of Nigerian writers such as Buchi Emecheta (*Second Class Citizen*), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Americanah*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*), Michael Afenfia (*Leave My Bones in Saskatoon*), and Roxane Gay (*Ayiti*), whose stories vividly capture the complexities of migration and cultural interaction.

Considering existing scholarly research and creative works, there is consistent evidence that literature serves as a powerful medium for cross-cultural exchange, offering both fictional and nonfictional narratives that transcend cultural boundaries. For example, Buchi Emecheta's 1974 novel *Second Class Citizen*, a creative feminist work, portrays the struggles of a Nigerian woman who relocates to the United Kingdom with her husband. Initially bound by the cultural expectations and beliefs of her homeland, which hinder her personal growth, she eventually finds empowerment through the legal system and cultural environment of her new country. In doing so, she resolves to build a better life for herself and her children. The story is rooted in Emecheta's personal experiences as an immigrant in the United Kingdom.

It is widely observed that many migratory literary writers have travelled away from their places of origin and encountered the intersection of two cultures, which inspires them to write from their own experiences. These works are more than mere fiction; as Banda notes, "the adage, 'write about what you know' lends itself to the production of migrant-story literature" (102).

Emecheta's literary successors have followed in her footsteps by creatively portraying migratory experiences, emphasising cultural differences and the boundaries they create. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in *Americanah* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*, explores the

complexities of living in a new country and navigating unfamiliar norms while maintaining a connection to one's place of origin. Through the character of Ifemelu, *Americanah* addresses themes such as corruption, racism, xenophobia, and identity, offering a nuanced depiction of cross-cultural realities faced by immigrants in the United States and the United Kingdom. In his essay titled "Pragmatic Exploration of Cross-Cultural Encounters in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*," Jegede affirms this interpretation, arguing that,

The novel illustrates how Ifemelu's behaviours, perceptions, and interactions are deeply influenced by the varying cultural environments she inhabits. For instance, in America, Ifemelu becomes acutely aware of her race and experiences the subtleties of American racism, which shapes her understanding of herself and her interactions with others. This contrasts with her experience in Nigeria, where race is not a primary marker of identity, but other factors such as class and ethnic background come to the fore. (103)

Adichie further explores the complexities of cross-cultural experience in her twelve-story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, portraying cultural disorientation, clashes, challenges of adaptation and integration, and the ongoing struggle to maintain connection with one's original identity.

Another critical point worth noting, which has a great influence on this thesis, is Adichie's use of language, which disrupts conventional narrative structures by blending Nigerian English, the Igbo language, and Standard English in what Murphy describes as a "transcultural narrative." He noted that "one of the most interesting features of the use of the English language in transcultural literature is the way it constructs difference, separation, and also absence from the global norm" (99). Adichie's linguistic choices often mirror her characters' cultural contrast and the migratory journeys and the challenges they face in assimilation, particularly in navigating the

linguistic aspects of a new culture. In further analysis of her texts, Murphy posits that “In *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Americanah*, the reader can appreciate a tension between the global and the local, a negotiation between global and local identities, in the use of Nigerian linguistic and cultural markers within the text. (99).

Adichie’s linguistic choices, which reflect the cultural identities of her characters, align with the position of De Caluwé et al. in *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*. They argue that “the culture-specific words and grammatical constructions of a language are conceptual tools which reflect a society’s past experience of doing and thinking about things in certain ways” (144). This supports the idea that writers’ stylistic and literary choices can serve as a means to convey cultural context and thematic intent.

Furthermore, in Nigerian-Canadian imaginative writings, storytelling plays a crucial role in fostering cross-cultural exchange. These narratives offer both Nigerian migrants and Canadian readers meaningful opportunities for understanding, reflection, and social critique. For example, Michael Afenfia’s *Leave My Bones in Saskatoon* (2023) explores the life of a Nigerian television presenter, Owoicho, who migrates to Saskatchewan in Canada with his daughter, following a traumatic experience of losing his wife and three of his children at the hands of armed bandits in Benue State, Nigeria. In Canada, he faces numerous challenges as he strives to build a better life for his family, all while navigating cultural differences, identity struggles, and the complexities of immigration.

Still burdened by the grief of losing his wife and children, and with his daughter, Ochanya, mourning the loss of her mother and siblings, they are confronted with the challenges of starting over in a foreign land. As immigrants, they face numerous hardships: Owoicho struggle to find employment that matches his qualifications; they encounter language barriers, culture shock,

nostalgia for home, loneliness, and a strained father-daughter relationship, all mixed with the uncertainty of their future. This emotionally-charged book reflects the harsh realities many immigrants face in Canada, caught between the pain of the home they have left behind and the difficulties of adapting to a new place. Much like Roxane Gay's *Ayiti*, it offers an unfiltered, unsentimental portrayal of life across two worlds, which is honest, vivid, and without colouration.

In addition, beyond the Nigerian immigration storytelling context, writers from other countries have also explored the theme of migration through various styles and settings. One notable example is Roxane Gay's *Ayiti*, a collection of 15 pieces published in 2018. Much like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Ayiti* portrays the experiences of diasporans, specifically Haitians living in the United States. The title *Ayiti* reflects the Haitian Creole pronunciation of "Haiti," the country that serves as both a symbolic and literal setting throughout the book.

The 15-story collection, which includes both very short, concise narratives and longer, more developed stories, is set in Haiti and the United States, respectively. It vividly explores a range of themes. As Arifa Akbar notes, "Each story revolves around Haiti, or Ayiti (its name in Haitian Creole), and while race, body politics, and sexuality are intersecting themes, the tightest focus is on nationhood and immigration — what it means to be a Haitian in Haiti, and to become American" (1).

Rooted deeply in the theme of migration, the book portrays the lived experiences of Haitian-American immigrants as they navigate racism, stereotypes, political instability, and cultural differences. Gay presents a nuanced depiction of both Haiti and the United States, avoiding

romanticisation and instead highlighting the harsh realities, struggles, and moments of beauty found in both places.

The multiple characters and diverse narrative voices employed by both Adichie and Gay in their respective short story collections significantly influenced the structural approach of this thesis as a short story collection. Gay's use of fragmentation is reflected in this project through the inclusion of both shorter and longer pieces. The works of Emecheta, Adichie, and Afenfia, set in Nigeria and other countries, were particularly instrumental to this project, as they mirror the Nigerian diasporic experiences that this thesis seeks to portray. Furthermore, Adichie's "transcultural narrative," which blends Igbo and English, has had a profound impact on the stylistic and linguistic choices of this thesis.

In the examples cited thus far, it is evident that the writers are centrally concerned not only with individuating characters through description and dialogue, but with representing the dynamics of cultural identity. Emphasis on the complex nature of cultural identity is one of the hallmarks of Nigerian diasporic literature. However, "Despite extensive scholarship on immigration and identity, gaps remain in our understanding of the cross-cultural encounters faced by African immigrants, particularly within literary contexts" (Jegade 101). Nigerian-Canadian immigrants, as part of the broader African diaspora, are not exempt from these experiences. While there has been considerable writing on the African diasporic experience, there is a notable lack of literature specifically addressing the Nigerian Canadian perspective, especially from the Newfoundland context.

Given that most stories in this thesis are set in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, a brief overview of the province is necessary. Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the ten provinces of Canada, located in the Atlantic region and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, with its

landscape surrounded by water bodies. The province experiences four distinct seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall, contrasting sharply with Nigeria's humid and tropical climate. Newfoundland's relatively secluded location has fostered a distinct culture, evident in its language, food, music, and arts, which sets it apart from other provinces in Canada. Its culture is strongly shaped by Irish, French, and Indigenous influences, with the population consisting largely of Caucasians and Indigenous peoples. One of the most notable cultural markers is its accent and use of English, commonly referred to as Newfoundland English. The article, "Discover our People and Culture", notes that this distinct way of speaking English dates back to four centuries and "the accents are rooted in Western England and Southern Ireland. There are also French and Indigenous influences"

The province has a distinct culture, and the people are conscious of it. As Michael Clair notes, "Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel a deep attachment to their province and are rightfully proud of their unique culture" (21). Clair further observes that "some people will understandably feel uncomfortable about allowing too many people from cultures that are very different from the English, Irish, and Scottish influences that predominate in the 'Newfoundland culture'" (21). The multicultural identity that shapes "Newfoundland culture" is distinct from the multicultural life that constitutes "Nigerian culture." Nigerian culture is deeply rooted in the country's diverse ethnic groups, as well as the lasting influence of British colonialism. This influence is evident in its food, music, arts, languages, and in the English dialect popularly known as Nigerian Pidgin English, a creole.

Over the past few years, more people from Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigerians, have settled in Newfoundland as students, workers, or by choice of relocation. When people from these culturally and geographically distinct areas come into contact, the outcome can vary. Will there be

acceptance, rejection, or indifference toward each other's cultures? A simple answer might be that these cultures can either be embraced or rejected, given that they are already products of multiple cultural influences. However, considering the complexity of human thoughts, ideologies, cultures, and lived experiences, such a simplified assumption would be insufficient. A clearer perspective can be found in the position of Niedenthal et al., who argue that cultural hybridity often emerges in such cases.

This hybridity is particularly evident in language, as individuals adjust their speech patterns to make communication easier, often resulting in the development of a new regional accent. Similarly, governments, policymakers, and businesses often adapt their strategies to accommodate new cultures while preserving harmony with existing traditions. Such hybridity is also reflected in literature, where works such as Nigerian-Canadian writings emerge.

With the increasing presence of immigrants in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially Nigerians, there is a growing need for writers to share stories from this distinctive perspective. Nigerian-Canadian (Newfoundlander) writers play a crucial role in expressing cultural differences and commonalities, thereby enriching the cultural landscape and fostering inclusivity. Their contributions not only give voice to underrepresented narratives but also help both newcomers and long-time residents better understand one another, ultimately working toward a more united and welcoming society.

1.1.3 Conclusion

Imaginative literature plays a powerful role in deconstructing stereotypes and resisting cultural invisibility. As Canada grapples with immigration challenges, where newcomers are sometimes perceived as threats to national unity and progress, and the complexities often

associated with a multicultural society, sharing stories from diverse cultures can foster greater understanding among people. Moreover, this “can also be potentially useful in deconstructing the impact such labelling and terms of representation have upon newcomers' constructions of self, as well as their self-esteem” (Kumar et al. 6). This, in turn, promotes cross-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding among different peoples, cultures, and races.

1.2 Relevance of the Thesis to Applied Literary Arts

“Leaving the Harmattan: A Creative Exploration of Diasporic Experiences Through Short Stories” is a creative project comprising twelve works of fiction and non-fiction that explore different themes surrounding migration and cross-cultural exchange, such as relocation, alienation, adaptation, xenophobia, co-existence, and climate change. It aims to contribute to the writing community, particularly within diasporic literature. The collection features original works that engage with existing literary traditions while experimenting with new narrative forms. It is both a literary and a scholarly work that employs innovative storytelling techniques.

As a literary collection, the work employs a range of styles, from traditional narratives to experimental prose poems infused with poetic elements to create a distinctive rhythm and structure. Inspired by Roxane Gay’s *Ayiti* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*, this collection of short stories, centred on migration, it adopts the short story form to offer varied perspectives on its central themes: migration, cultural differences and alienation, identity, disillusionment, racism, corruption, and feminism. This experimentation not only contributes to the existing migratory and cultural discourse but also has the potential to influence future writers and scholars in expanding the boundaries of literary art.

Its blend of poetic devices and prosaic elements, along with the use of two languages (Igbo and English) and the portrayal of two distinct places in a concise writing form, can serve as a valuable model for writers exploring similar paths and for the literary arts more broadly. In addition, its short form and experimentation with various plot structures and narrative points of view can spark meaningful discussions in literary analysis. Its themes of migration, cross-cultural exchange, and climate change may also inspire writers and scholars to share their insights and contribute to ongoing conversations around postcolonialism, diasporic literature, and both Nigerian and Canadian literature.

Furthermore, as part of the Master of Applied Literary Arts program, the thesis carries the teachings and practical components of the discipline. Through coursework in creative writing, publishing, literary production, arts management, and information management, as well as relevant internships, I gained a comprehensive understanding of the program. These experiences prepared me for the development of this thesis: the constructive feedback from creative assignments and scholarly work analyses helped shape the writing of this collection. The process of writing these works gave tangible expression to my learning.

Moreover, the thesis affirms the legitimacy of creative writing as a form of scholarly research. It demonstrates that storytelling can serve as a research method, highlighting non-traditional approaches to knowledge production within academia. This it does without the restrictions and rules that dictate other academic and technical writings. It allows for self-expression in a way that keeps the attention of the readers while conveying the message it intends to portray. Also, this form is the best approach for the thesis, as storytelling can capture the attention of a wider readership compared to traditional academic writing. As such, it holds

relevance for scholars in literary studies, cultural studies, migration studies, and the broader humanities.

In conclusion, the lived experiences, cultural contexts, and imaginative narrations explored in this thesis serve as a valuable research reference, providing deep insights into the lives of people and their environment. Researchers can engage these stories by analysing them to understand a particular subject matter, and to understand different worldviews, cultures and patterns through the oral narratives embedded in the collection.

1.3 Objectives of the Thesis

This thesis aims to produce original stories that explore themes of place and migration, cross-cultural exchange, co-existence, resilience and climate change by shining light on two different countries, Canada and Nigeria. This aims to contribute to the already existing writings on diasporic literature, especially African diasporic writing in Canada, from a unique and distinctive style.

Drawing on personal experiences, imagination, and the creative works of writers like Roxanne Gay, Chimamanda Adichie, and Buchi Emechata, the project employs a mixed approach to storytelling, combining prosaic form and poetic techniques. This allows for a nuanced exploration of fictional techniques, writing styles, thematic and character development, and setting while maintaining the attention of the readers.

While the stories are works of fiction, they illuminate the non-fictional realities of the subject matter that shapes the overall collection. Through the description of the characters' experiences, it explores the discussion surrounding migration, relocation, cross-culturalism, and climate change and adaptation.

These stories illustrate the powerful interconnection between storytelling and cultural exchange. For example, the story “Closer to the Ocean” portrays the experiences of newcomers adjusting to a place that differs significantly from their place of origin, particularly in terms of culture and climate.

The project also pays attention to the interconnected themes of migration, cross-cultural exchange, and climate change. “Leaving the Harmattan” explores the transition between two distinct places, highlighting differences in weather and environment as the characters migrate and attempt to adapt to their new environment. This story provides valuable insight into both locations, offering readers a deeper understanding that may aid them in navigating similar transitions.

Ultimately, the objective of this thesis is to contribute to scholarly and literary discussions on migration, cross-cultural exchange, and climate change. It aims to reveal diverse and potentially adaptive strategies for adjusting to a new environment in the face of cultural differences and climate change. This approach has the potential to help outline new ways of belonging in a new place, fostering unity and mutual respect within a multicultural society.

1.4 Overview of the Sections and Stories

This is a collection of twelve original literary works, both fiction and nonfiction, featuring distinct characters, styles, and settings. Although each piece stands alone as an individual short story with its unique qualities, they are thematically linked and arranged to enhance the reader's comprehension. Despite their varied characters and locations, together, they explore recurring themes such as place and displacement, migration, and cross-cultural exchange.

The stories draw inspiration from traditional narrative forms while also experimenting with new and contemporary storytelling techniques. They engage with the established elements of

fiction, such as setting, character, conflict, plot, point of view, theme, and tone, not merely to apply them, but to use them as a foundation for creative exploration. These elements are interwoven with poetic devices and narrative techniques like foreshadowing, simile, metaphor, repetition, allusion, flashback, and symbolism, among others. Through this integration, the writing is restructured to develop an approach that brings rhythm and imagery to life.

Each section of the second chapter comprises a different story. The first five sections, “Egbe bere, Ugo bere,” “The Place,” “The City on the Hill,” and “Man in the Rain,” open with a description of what the narrator refers to as “home,” a place that is continually in the subsequent stories. Home to the characters is their place of origin, birth, and where they lived before relocating to a new place. As it is portrayed in the narrations, “its location is associated with self and with community identities that are deterritorialized or constructed across borders and boundaries of phenomena such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship” (Agnew 15). It is not just a physical location, but the environment, family, friends, neighbours, culture and everything else that make up the place.

In subsequent stories, the reader is introduced to new settings where characters’ encounters, anxieties, and emotions are described, lending the stories an aura of verisimilitude. The detailed depiction of their experiences, along with the portrayal of real-life locations and environmental conditions, makes the stories relatable to actual migrant experiences.

The structure and sequence of the stories create a natural sense of progression. The first four works, “Egbe bere, Ugo bere,” “The Place,” “The City on the Hill,” and “Man in the Rain,” are written primarily in a prose-poem style and establish the initial setting of Nigeria. The following four works, “White Dust,” “Leaving the Harmattan,” “Night in the Daytime,” and “Cold Ashes,” gradually mark a transitional phase, shifting the narrative between Nigeria and Canada.

These stories engage in a back-and-forth movement across the two countries, introducing contrasting perspectives and stylistic experimentation that reinforce the thesis's central themes of migration, climate change, cross-cultural exchange and integration.

The final four stories, "What do you see?" "A Closer Meeting," "The Oldest Person I Met," and "Closer to the Ocean" are set entirely in Canada (Newfoundland). These pieces deepen the exploration of the core themes, offering insights and further contrast between the two cultural landscapes. The characters portray the experiences of immigrants through their encounters, speech and actions. Themes such as xenophobia and cultural exchange, co-existence, deepen the thesis's central discussion.

Each story focuses on an aspect of the central themes, place and displacement, migration, and cross-cultural exchange, creating a cohesive narrative arc across the collection. While the settings, characters, and narrative styles differ, they are united by a shared subject matter to form a coherent literary compilation.

Narrative voices range from first to second and third person, and each story employs a distinct structure and tone. While some of the works employ traditional short story forms, others are structured as prose poems. Also, some employed dialogue, while others were written without dialogue, but they were narrated and described to create mental images of the events in the stories.

Despite these variations, recurring stylistic elements, such as symbolic language, thematic motifs, and a blend of Igbo and English languages, serve as connective tissue in the stories. The use of two languages in the stories highlights the cultural and ideological differences between the two places. This choice emphasises the important role language plays in shaping culture: "In different societies people not only speak different languages, they also use them in different ways,

following different cultural norms.” (De Caluwé et al, 140). It also helps unify the project by reinforcing its themes and coherence as it reflects the characters’ deep connection to their place of origin and their efforts to adapt to a new environment.

The alternating settings of Enugu (Nigeria) and Newfoundland (Canada) also contribute to the overall unity of the work. The recurring presence of Enugu and the gradual transition to Newfoundland mirror the migratory journey that underpins the thesis. Although the characters differ across the stories, they often share similar emotional and experiential landscapes, reinforcing the thematic continuity of the collection.

Chapter 2

2.1 Egbe bere, Ugo bere

On the only branch of the only tree, just in the middle of the lonely village, two birds of not-same-size, one big-headed and the other small-headed, squall and squabble for the only branch of the only tree.

“Egbe bere, Ugo bere!” a voice was heard in the distance.

With the speed of lightning and a heavy gust of wind, the big-headed bird with a curved, yellowish beak soars above the tree without stopping. Suddenly, with elegance and grace, it stops, flaps its wings and hovers over the only tree. Its white head with two fierce-looking yellowish eyes stares like it's about to unearth the hidden secret of the village.

“I am the king of the sky. I own the cliff and own the land. I sight my prey from afar. I grab them without landing and take flight without missing.”

It spreads its wings wider, glides and flaps over the only tree.

“The tree belongs to me, so does the only branch. Me and me alone!” it declares.

“Egbe bere! Ugo bere!” the voice intones.

With a sneer and swift dive, the other, small-headed bird swirls like an acrobatic athlete around the only branch of the only tree. Its long, pointed wings and tail with rough edges, shaped

like two paths that connect at a junction, were a sight pleasing to the eyes. It hovers around the only tree.

“I am known by the birds, by the reptiles of the land, by the crawling snails, by the worms in the soil and even by humans. I know the sky and I know the land. I snatch prey from the jaws of other birds of prey.”

It twirls around the only tree and screeches, “The tree belongs to me, so does the only branch. Me and me alone!”

“Egbe bere! Ugo bere!” The voice continues.

Then, with a domineering authority, the big-headed bird lands its yellow feet on the only branch of the only tree, clutches its long black talons, steadfastly holds onto the branch and fixes its gaze above.

The small-headed bird followed suit with ferocious speed and settled its feet firmly beside the other bird, held the only branch with its talon, closed its wings and held its head high.

Soon came the tussle and violent shaking of the only branch. Feathers flew around and underneath the branch. Suddenly! A clack! Then a snap. The fallen sound of the only branch of the only tree was heard from afar.

Later, two tired birds of big and small heads with not many feathers glide about, looking for a branch on which to perch.

“Egbe bere, Ugo bere ma nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwa ya!”

2.2 The Place

I know the place. The place, deeply rooted in the flourishing rainforest of the Sub-Saharan. The place where the glorious sun rises and the valleys sit at the foot of the leaning hills, covered by houses, people here and there. Where the fruity scents of cashew, mango, pineapple linger, and the green leaves sing the songs of the rainy season, and the dusty roofs announce the arrival of the Harmattan. A place where the little ones dance in the rain with laughter and the minstrels raise their voices in merriment.

Yes, it is the place where the abandoned coal mines tell the ruins of the colonial masters. Its people, forced through the “Door of No Return,” across the seas, into plantation farms and the remaining kindred left to lick their wounds. Then came the war, yes, the massacre by its own brothers. Like a mother hen, it helplessly watched the blood of its children, its youths, its people flow down the River Niger into the Atlantic. Thousands? No, millions of heads rolled. Mothers wept for sons. Brothers groaned for their beloveds, never to be seen again. It is a place nearly stripped of its identity and left to clean others' vomit.

Deserted, ruined and left to never rise. Alas! Out of the ashes, out of the rumbles, out of the pains, with memory of loved ones, its people dust the streets to build anew. “*Ozọ-emena*,” they say. The children fill the streets again, and the voices of the minstrels are heard over the hills with new chants, new songs, new hopes, new dreams, new voices. Yes, I know the place. It is the place I cried my first cry. It is the place I call Home.

2.3 The City on a Hill

Down the road, at the centre of East, look closely, you will find it. From the top, you will see its valleys and hills like a deep wave in the sea on the red, muddy, rocky soil of Mother Earth. As you

step into its valley, its hill will accost you. Stand your ground and look around. Its evergreen vegetation and red-yellow Ixora will cheer you up.

When you step on the hill, the blazing, biting Sun will surely be there, and you will be thirsty. Just remember to satisfy your taste with its spring water by the rocky hill and use the large heart-shaped cocoyam leaf as a shield. The drum-beating rain might meet you on the way. Don't think too much about it, seek refuge under any of the gummy trees of cashew, the long-leaved mango, the eye-catching orange tree, or even the avocado. If you look further, the array of trees of udara, ucheku, and plantain can be your companion. No matter the weather, persevere till you meet the best of the city.

And when you finally make it to the top, stand and look around, up and down the hill, behold its pride, its people: youths dancing to the beat of the Ogene, Market-women telling the tale of yesterday, men with hoes and cutlasses making ways to their farmland. And you will see children with school bags hurrying to school. Laughing! Chatting! Crying! Quarrelling! You will see them all. You will hear *Nnọ* - welcome, for that's what they are known for, even to strangers. And when you have seen it, felt it and lived it, remember it's Enugu - the city on the hill.

2.4 Man in the Rain

I can see clearly now the rain is gone

I can see all obstacles in my way

Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind

It's gonna be a bright (bright)

Bright (bright) sunshiny day...

On a very hazy-lazy cloudy day, on the balcony of an old apartment, a man could be seen counting the pile of bills, as if he were counting his meagre salary. From the stereo speaker in his room, Jimmy Cliff's voice could be heard serenading the afternoon silence. This would be the third time the playlist was repeated, and he had no plan to pause it, just as he had no control over the dramas that had been unfolding in his life. Soon, the debt collectors would be at his door, and the landlord would come knocking. At least the little foodstuffs in the kitchen could still carry him for a day or two, but after that, what next? He paused for a moment, listened to the lyric, sang along and sighed.

“If only it were true,” he muttered to himself and continued counting.

The sky kept getting darker, and the heavy wind of the rainy season joined the hazy cloud to interrupt his thoughts. Soon, it began drizzling, and the drizzling turned to dripping, then droplets, then a heavy downpour.

“Well, the dark clouds are not leaving anytime soon.” He said as he looked up to the sky.

He stood closer to the railing and leaned on it. He stretched out his hand and cupped it to get a scoop of water from the rain, then opened it and allowed it to slip away. He did this repeatedly before he stopped to watch the cloud gradually marching towards darkness and the rain flowing freely on the street.

From the balcony, he could see about five children dashing into the rain: jumping, talking, screaming and splashing their feet against the muddy soil. Their clothes were soon drenched in water, but they seemed unperturbed. Giggling and wide laughter filled the air. Their voices joined the drummy sound of the rain to provide lyrics to nature's rhythm. One touched the other and shouted, “Catch me if you can!” Then sped off. The other ran after him.

One of the children with kinky, unplaited, bouncing hair stood still and spread her hand as if she was about to hug an invisible person. Then she lifted her head with her eyes closed and allowed the rain to drop straight onto her face and run down her whole body. Droplets of water flowed freely from her hair, giving the view of someone in a shower. She opened her mouth wide and stuck her tongue out, allowing water to run into it and gradually sucked it back. Beside her, stood a boy who watched and later joined her. They repeated this more than three times before joining the others in their game.

After months of living on this street, he could easily recognise the faces of the children as *everyone knew everyone*. He knew them from their usual *hide-and-seek games*, whether in the rain or not; they usually had a reason to play around. Countless times has he seen them playing, but this time he looked at them differently.

The games, the laughter, the lifting up of hands in the rain invoked something inside the man, something he had not felt for years. The memories of the past that had been sleeping were awoken in him... Days when he never minded the weather. He would play in the rain until Mama called for him. Days when he would laugh until his sides seemed to be tearing up. He would sit for hours with friends and chat about anything. Those were the days of dreams and hopes. The days he believed that the sky was his limit.

“Oh! Where are those days?” he asked inaudibly.

He stretched out his hand in the rain again and again. He held the rail tighter, moving swiftly and wiping the droplets of rain on it. Then slowly, he walked down the stairs and let himself out of the building, into the open, without shelter, unhidden from the heavy downpour.

He stood still for a while and spread his hands wide, lifted his head with his eyes closed and stuck out his tongue, then gradually brought the water in, allowing it to fill his mouth, slowly

swallowing it, swallowing whatever it came with. The pure, undiluted scent of rain filled his nostrils with sweetness. He allowed the rain to pour over his almost bald head, to soak his hairy body, and to drench his clothes. He allowed them to flow—the water, the tears mixed with water—without stopping.

The children had stopped playing by now, and all attention was directed to the grown-up in the rain. They watched in awe, whispered, and giggled among themselves.

For the moment, he forgot the pile of bills, the rent, the unfulfilled dreams, the unfolding dramas of his life. He let himself be a child in the rain again.

Back in the apartment, Ty Bello's scintillating voice gently flows from the speaker, carrying the essence of her hit song, *Greenland*.

...The season's just beginning

The sunlight it hides as the clouds make way

For the pouring of my blessings

I will not be afraid...

2.5 White Dust

I watched as the glistening white dust slowly descended from the sky onto the walkway, the trees, the cars, and anywhere it could reach. Gradually, like the locusts' armies, they perched on the leaves, forming white shiny spots. Soon, the once vibrant and colourful landscape of red, orange, green, yellow and brown was blanketed by the glistening white powder, accompanied by a hazy cloud.

I gently unlocked the window knob to have a better view of the wonder of creation. I have heard, read, and watched it on television, but had not touched or seen it in real life.

“It is very white and looks like shredded Styrofoam,” one had explained.

“It is like freezing white talcum powder,” another had told me.

The heavy wind that arrived with it accosted me as I opened the window and stretched out my hand to welcome the white dust. For the first time, I could touch it, I could feel it. It was soft, rough, fluffy, and melted with the feeling of cool, then chilly, then freezing and biting. I couldn't find the right word to describe it. I could only say it looked like the tiny white frost that built up inside our freezer.

2.6 Leaving the Harmattan

Before he left the place of chilly Harmattan for the place of biting Winter, before he felt the snow and knew what snow squalls were, Harmattan was the coldest season he knew. He had known what it was to have cracked lips and white, dry skin that looked like it was desperately in need of body cream. It was not the best season for him, but it cannot be said that he totally disliked it. Its hazy, dusty wind could not cloud the feeling he had at the beginning of the season. The joy it brought always radiates to his young heart, especially when he knows that Christmas is coming closer, and he will be travelling “home”.

“I can perceive Christmas.” Chidi would say.

That smell filled him with the hope of travelling to see his grandma, his cousins, and other relatives who always travel from far and near to spend the holiday in the village. This had been a tradition that he grew up with. His father would drive them from the big city around the 22nd of every December, and they would stay till after the New Year celebration. Sometimes, he would drop them off with Grandma and return to Enugu for work. It was the time of the year that he

looked forward to. Saying *a shorter goodbye* after the New Year was his saddest part. Though he knew it was for a short while, the eleven months in between seemed like they never ended.

But in the wee hours of that fateful 31st December morning, family, friends, and neighbours beat the chilly cold and the dusty wind not to bid them *a shorter goodbye*. This time, the goodbye was in their house in Enugu, and it seemed to be *a longer one*. Though it was pitch dark around midnight, their compound was a beehive of activity. Everyone was busy helping to take their luggage to the car, waiting outside. Most of their properties had been sold, and some given away. His cousins had cut short their Christmas holiday in the village and arrived a day earlier with their parents to help them pack their luggage.

His grandma sat on the only cushion remaining in the parlour, with her hands in between her stretched-out legs and her head bowed down. Ever since Chidi's parents announced that their visa had been approved and they would be leaving very soon, her countenance had changed. It was more pronounced when their Christmas vacation was shortened to prepare for their move before the New Year.

"But you and Amaka have a good job and business here," Grandma had argued with her son on the evening of Christmas Eve in the village.

"It's for a better future. For our children," her son had tried to reason with him.

"Future? Didn't your father and I give you a good life here?" She opened her hand wide like she was looking for something.

He stared at her for some time and opened his mouth to say something but thought otherwise. He knew it would be futile to explain his reasons to his mother. Silence descended in

the room, and the only sound that was heard was the ticking of the clock on the wall. The children watched as mother and son dwelt in their thoughts.

Eight months earlier, words like Permanent Residency, Newfoundland, Canada, visa, medical license exams, and so many others that they could not explain had been flying from their father, Agozie, to their mother, Amaka. Chidi could not clearly understand what his father meant when he announced that their permanent residence, which he called PR, had been approved and they would be “leaving.”

His older sister, Akachi, tried to explain to him, “we are moving away and will *never* return to Enugu.”

He wondered if it was really true that his father would leave his medical practice and his mum, her business, to go to another place and *never* return. Agozie was a medical doctor with one of the government hospitals in the state, and Amaka owned a fashion house with up to three apprentices and four workers.

After what seemed like an eternity, Grandma resumed her talk, refusing to give up.

“Who will you leave this house for?” Agozie remained silent. “You don’t even know much about the place or if you will succeed there,” Grandma added, almost pleading.

“We are not sure until we try.” Agozie finally said, firmly.

“And taking these little ones away from home to an unknown place!” This time, she raised her voice, pointing towards her grandchildren who were sitting beside her. Agozie recoiled to his chair without making an utterance.

They left their hometown on the evening of 26th December, still in the festive mood and with a mood of urgency. Agozie had booked their flight for the 31st, and they had to go back to the city to tidy up things, to be ready for departure. He said he wanted them to start the New Year in their new place, which he described as *New Year, New Land*. On their way back, the husband and wife kept going back and forth on the arrangements and things that needed to be done. From their tone, one could feel the excitement and joy. They said it was a dream come true, to experience life outside their homeland, to see other parts of the world.

“Are we going to visit Grandma at the village for next Christmas?” Akachi asked.

Her parents were quiet for a few seconds before Amaka attempted to respond.

“Weeeellll... we will try to be home whenever we can.”

“What about school?” Chidi asked, “My class will go on an excursion next term.”

“You will have fun activities in your new school.”

He opened his mouth to add that his classmates would not be there, his teacher would not be there either, and it would not be the same school, but his father interrupted.

“You will experience the snow and make new friends.”

For Chidi and Akachi, the two-hour drive from their hometown to the city was silent, except for occasional questions from their mother to make sure they were alright. Chidi rested his head on the window and occupied his thoughts with the array of trees beside the road. They seemed to be running very fast in the opposite direction when the car passed them. Their green leaves were

beginning to wither, and dried brown leaves could be seen flying around the trees. Dusty brown particles were beginning to surface on the tarred roads, cars and the rusty zinc roofs of most of the houses they passed by, marking the end of the rainy season. The once greenish, vibrant scenery was blanketed with brownish dust particles.

He kept wondering what their new place would look like and if his new classmates would like him. *Will he never see his grandma and cousins again? Will his classmates miss him?* He dwelled on his thoughts until he fell asleep, only to be awoken when they arrived home.

The following days were a hive of activity as Amaka moved back and forth between the house and the market. Most of their belongings gradually disappeared, and every few minutes, a buyer or two would show up to pick up some items. Some things, especially the children's toys, were given away.

Amidst the hazy, cold weather of that early morning, Chidi slowly and sleepily made his way to the car, where the luggage had been perfectly loaded, and the driver was waiting to start the engine. The air was dry, and the wind blew fiercely as if it might tear the roof off.

He kept rubbing his eyes and twitching his nose, gently removing the dry mucus that had built up in his tiny nostrils. His lips glistened with the Vaseline his mother had applied, and he resisted the urge to lick them. It was only a matter of time before they dried out again. Cracks were already beginning to form, and Chidi could feel the peppery sting on his lips. His mother had taken the time to apply so much Vaseline that his face shone like a mirror.

"I don't want your skin to turn white," she had insisted seriously when he tried to resist.
"We have a long way to go."

Everyone was talking, laughing, and hugging, while some, like Grandma, spoke very little. She had hardly said a word since arriving yesterday, holding onto her grandchildren instead. She helped Chidi climb into the car and sat next to him to accompany them to the airport. When the car began to leave, they kept waving at the people they were leaving behind as their figures became more and more faint until they were out of sight.

Chidi craned his neck toward the window, trying to catch a glimpse of their destination, as the plane gradually landed at St. John's Airport, Newfoundland, in the early morning of January 1st. But it seemed that everything was buried in thick, white, glistening blankets. He could barely identify any figures outside the window, as the flurry of snow obscured the already hazy sky.

After they disembarked and collected their luggage, they made their way to the front door, where they would board a taxi to their new apartment, one they had secured while still in Enugu through a Newfoundland Facebook group for rentals.

Before they stepped out of the door, Amaka helped Chidi to put on his coat, which he complained was the heaviest thing he had ever worn in his life. As the entrance door opened, they were greeted by a heavy gust of wind that nearly knocked him off balance; he would have fallen if not for his father's firm grip. The wind was stronger than anything he had ever experienced, even harsher than Harmattan.

The white landscape fully came into view, with cars, roads, and trees blanketed in snow. His body shivered as they walked toward the cab waiting at the entrance. Tiny, prickling goosebumps were visible on his skin. He paused and looked around at the snow, the wind, the cold, and wondered if the whole place was built in a freezer. He held onto his father tightly as they walked, trusting him to lead the way to their New-Found-Place.

Chidi zipped his coat and tucked his hands in the heavily-padded mittens. With his snow boot properly laced and the woollen hat on his head, he stood beside the door waiting for his family to dress up. From the window of their new apartment, he could see the snow slowly covering the walkway and the driveway his father had shovelled earlier in the morning.

In the middle of the front yard stood a pine tree gently nodding its branches to the wind. Most of its leaves were heavily coated with patches of snow, giving it a mixture of shiny white and green. With the heavy snowfall they witnessed in the last few days, it would be hard for a newcomer to believe that the place was a greenish front yard full of buttercup flowers in the summer. The family only caught a glimpse of the remaining green grasses before they were swallowed by the glistening white particles.

Agozie had suggested to them that they go outside to play in the snow, after days of staying indoors and hopping from cars to the apartment like scared rabbits. He did throw ideas with excitement in his eyes. Building snowmen, making snow angels or whatever people do in winter, just as he had seen on the internet.

The thoughts of staying outside in the cold for long sent a shiver down the spines of the children, but they were willing to have the experience. Agozie opened the door and stepped onto the patio, holding the door for Chidi and Akachi to join him. It was not as windy as the day they arrived, but the snowfall had increased as if it was in a hurry to pour out its whole content. Chidi hesitated, standing in the doorway and peeping outside.

“Snow is raining,” he said as he withdrew from the door.

“Yes, it’s snowing,” Amaka responded, holding and urging him to step outside.

He stepped onto the patio with his three-layered dress and heavily padded boots, still struggling to get used to them. They moved toward the part of the veranda where the snow was piled high.

“We will first make a snow angel,” Agozie announced while lying on the untouched, soft snow. He lay flat on his back with his hands and legs spread wide open, as he had seen on the internet. He began moving his arms up and down and his legs side to side like the flapping of a bird's wing with little squeaky sounds, adding rhythms to the movement. With each *flapping*, the snow shifted beneath him, forming a pile beside him. After a few *flaps*, Amaka helped him to carefully stand up. Behind him was revealed a figure like an angel with a shining, flowing gown and wings stretched out. Akachi and Amaka followed next. Each marking their imprint in the *sand of snow*.

When it was Chidi’s turn, he stood still and kept looking from his parents to the snow and from the snow to his parents. He allowed his mind to wander back to Enugu and *what he would tell his cousins during Christmas. The tales he would narrate to his classmates and the stories he would ... wait!* He paused and looked around, and his family cheered him on. *Will Christmas be the same again? Will Grandma be there to welcome them when they return? ... Will they never return like Akachi said?*

At this moment, he slowly lay on the untouched, soft part of the snow and began moving his arms up and down and his legs side to side like the flapping of a bird's wing. The corner of his lips twitched uncontrollably, showing something that looked like a smile. He allowed his mind to

focus on whatever his eyes could see, his body to feel the soft snow and his hands to *flap* like birds in this newly found place.

2.7 Cold Ashes

It was yesterday. Or should I say, it was just like yesterday when the village *ilo* was buzzing. People walked around like a swarm of bees, farmers with their hoes hanging from their shoulders and cutlasses held steadily in their hands. Schoolchildren could be seen running to school, and market women rushing to meet the early morning customers. Those were the days before the frenzy of the big city took over the land. When only a few sons and daughters of Ndiala lived outside the town, and those few made it a point of duty to return home.

Ndiala was not as big as the cities, but it had its offspring were scattered in these cities. Its hinterland and rural location were overshadowed by the larger ones. It didn't pride itself on the amenities found in other places, nor the rapid growth of the bigger towns. No, there was no electricity, no internet, no big industries, none of the *buzz* and *bling* of the cities. But it prided itself in its produce, its cultures and festivals, and its children, its sons and daughters.

Those days were the early and teenage years of Uloaku. Uloaku was what most people would call a *homebred* of Ndiala town. She knew the town, and the town knew her. She knew the hills, the valleys, the trees of the land, the folklore, the rivers and even the unspoken taboos. Her farmer parents never thought of moving outside their hometown as they prefer their *quiet life* to the *busy life*. She only visited the big cities for a short holiday with her relatives. Her delight was in the festivals of the town and in welcoming her relatives who usually travelled from different parts of the world to spend time with them. Those whom her grandmother called *Ndi njem* - sojourners.

In those days, during festive seasons, Uloaku and her siblings, Nchedo and Ikedi, would sit under the mango tree at the outskirts of the town, overlooking the road that leads to the big city, waiting for the arrival of her *Ndi njem*. For she knew they would come, and they never failed to arrive. She was always on the lookout for her cousins, Akachi, Chidi, Ify and others. And when she saw their vehicles from afar, she would leap for joy and run to embrace them as they alighted from their car. Others would join her to welcome the long-expected kindred.

Those were the days when she would lead her cousins who came from the city through the nooks and crannies of their hometown. She was always the “tour guide” and took pride in her *work*. They followed her like the chickens with their mother hen. She would take them round the closely knitted community to greet the other towners who usually gave them gifts of fruits, roasted meat, fish or foods wrapped in cocoyam leaves.

Taking them into the rainforest on the edge of the town to pick *udara* fruit and search for mangoes was an adventure she held close to her heart. Sometimes, she would climb the trees like an *Ọsa* without a sheath, her hands gripping the branches and bare feet stepping carefully on the rough, bumpy trunk. The others would watch in awe as she shook the branches with her feet. The leaves would rustle, and one by one, the fruits would break free from their strongholds, some tumbling to the ground with heavy thuds, others so ripe they splattered as they landed.

Nchedo and Akachi had the task of gathering the scattered fruits, sorting the ripe from the unripe, and separating the good ones from those already rotten. Chidi and the other children would carefully place the chosen fruits into a bag.

On other days, they went in search of cashews. With the movement of black soldier ants and the gummy sap on the trees, climbing was never an option. Instead, they used long sticks to hit the ripe yellow and red cashews or threw stones until the fruits came tumbling down.

And when they had plucked the fruits, they walked down to the village river where they would sit and enjoy the *fruits of their labour*. Afterwards, Uloaku and the other older ones plunged into the river to cool off from the heat. Chidi would cling to her back as they waded into the deeper parts of the water. He would kick his legs and burst with laughter each time they emerged from beneath the surface, water visible on their bare skin like raindrops. He loved following her wherever she went as if he were stuck to her with glue. Once they were done, they would return home, where the older family members had already prepared a meal.

And in the days when the full moon was expected, the anticipation for the *Egwu Onwa* - Moonlight Plays filled the whole town with excitement. Children hurriedly finished their chores, mothers prepared the meals on time, and the older adults helped arrange the bonfire at the *ilo*. Those were the days when grown-ups would search their memories for the folktales they had heard and would recount them with nostalgia.

When it was time, the younger children would sit around the fireplace with the grandma or the oldest of each family, telling the great stories of war between the animal kingdom and hunger, the tortoise as the cleverest animal, the beautiful maiden and the ghost, the great adventure of the heroes and legends of the land. The children listened with rapt attention as their faces glowed with the firelight. Those were the favourite moments for Chidi and the younger ones. They memorised and recited every word of the storyteller so that they would tell their friends in the city.

Glimmering lights would be seen in other compounds with voices of the storytellers, and sometimes the children's voices, reciting choruses from popular tales of the town. The full moon shone so brightly that you could see elders sitting in a darker corner recalling memories of those who had joined their ancestors, who are married, who put to bed. Any talk that keeps the night moving.

Uloaku and the older children from other compounds would troop into the *Ilo* under the light of the full moon. They would form a circle around the burning logs of wood of the bonfire, placed in the centre of the *Ilo*, where they would sing popular folk songs and dance the popular folk dances. Uloaku's face would beam with excitement as she showed the city children, like Akachi, how to move their legs to the rhythm.

Afterwards, they drifted into smaller groups, each settling on *Egwu Onwa* of their choice. Some age groups chose to gather separately, while a few, like Uloaku and Akachi, practised new dance steps, and others sat around the burning fire, adding more logs now and then to keep it alive. In two or more shadowy corners, silhouetted teenage couples could be seen in the dark with little tete-a-tete and occasional giggle. These moments continued late into the night, until the burning logs slowly dimmed and turned into glowing embers. One by one, they began to leave, voices fading with the embers until the last person was gone, and the embers turned into ashes.

With the rising of the sun, the town would bubble again with its usual morning activities. The children helped sweep the ashes in the fireplaces of their homesteads. Some of them voluntarily took their brooms to help sweep the *ilo*. Picking and packing the debris from the previous night. The now cold ashes would be properly swept and poured into the nearer bush. This they did, knowing that they would come back for another fun night.

Although short-lived, these moments were something Uloaku eagerly anticipated each year and season. As soon as one gathering ended, she would already begin to dream of the next, a time when everyone, both those from the town and the city, would come together, filling the town with laughter and life again.

She often talked with her cousins about the adventures they would embark on next time, the trees they would explore, the people they would visit, and the new folk songs and dances she would teach them. Sometimes, Uloaku even went a step further, sharing songs and dances performed during marriage rites. She hoped that when the time came, Akachi and the other girls would join her in performing them.

But the years passed, and the days slowly joined the past years. A lot had changed. Things once seen only in the big cities were now appearing in Ndiala; electricity, internet, and other amenities were gradually being introduced.

Yet, each year, one or two more *Ndi njem* would not make the journey back home. Instead, they sent their greetings through others, explaining that they were too busy to return. Many never returned, while some returned as a body to be buried in their homesteads. It was not just the *Ndi njem*; more of the *homebred* joined them, leaving in search of a *better* life.

Many of the older generations had passed on. In some homes, the cold ashes from the last fire still lingered, untouched, with no one left to sweep them away. The houses, now empty, were slowly falling into disrepair, uninhabited and forgotten.

Uloaku, like many others, stayed. Even after she got married, she remained on the farm like her parents, just as she always had. On the day of her marriage rites, Chidi and Akachi were

not there. She hadn't laid eyes on them since they left for abroad with their parents over fourteen years ago. Sometimes they called, and she often left a comment on their social media posts when they shared something. Nchedo, who now resides in the big city, was able to attend the wedding, but she left the very next morning.

Sometimes, people like Uloaku will gather in the *ilo* for *Egwu Onwa*. Uloaku still hopes and longs for the day *Ndi njem* will return home again. At times, they sit silently around the burning fire, saying and doing very little. Only the giggles and cries of toddlers are heard, as the remaining adults murmur among themselves and sometimes sit in quiet reflection, holding on to memories that were slowly fading away like the embers turning to ashes.

2.8 Night in the Daytime

29th May 2006

At Holy Hill Nursery and Primary School in Enugu State, Nigeria, we were all seated, eagerly anticipating the great event. Silence ruled over the school like an abandoned haunted town. I couldn't recall the exact time it began, but I remember that I was in primary six, and Teacher Njideka Ozor was my class teacher. No student was allowed outside the classroom, nor allowed to loiter around.

“No noise-making will be allowed!” our teacher had announced when we arrived in the morning.

No footsteps were heard outside except those of the Headmistress, who was going from one classroom to another, making sure that everything was in order. We quietly solved the math problems given to keep us busy. One of my very quiet classmates with sharp eyes for catching noisemakers was assigned to write down the names of defaulters, for punishment. But in the hush between her eyes, we whispered and giggled softly in secret ways. Most of us had a lot to say, a lot to chatter about, but nobody dared to say anything.

From my class window, I could see everywhere brightened up as the blazing Sun gradually rose to its peak. My head dared to tilt directly towards the Sun, but the fear of getting blind pulled it back. I guessed the Moon was somewhere waiting for time or warming up. Maybe it was already standing close to the Sun. *Who knows!* Whatever was going on there, I hoped they would soon relieve us from this surging silence that is overshadowing the whole school. Amid the ruling quietness, we heard a low, shaky voice.

“Teacher, I want to pee.”

The whole class gasped like we had seen a ghost. *How dare that person want to pee in this atmosphere!* We followed the voice and saw one of the boys sitting at the back, shaking like a cassava leaf with his knees knocking and his hands between his thighs, his face covered in tiny drops of sweat.

“Ha! You should have told me,” Teacher Ozor said, after seeing the condition of the boy. She stood up from her seat and led him to the restroom that was at the end of the building. The boy, bent at the waist, hands cupped below, followed her walking like one with a disjointed waist. She escorted him to the restroom that was at the end of the building. My heart felt for the teacher

and the boy. *What if they get caught up in the coming event? What if they look directly at the Sun? What if... what if?* I was still in the state of *what if* when I saw her accompanying him back to the class like a security guard.

“At least, his pee will not ruin this historical experience for us,” I muttered to myself.

It was not going to be just an experience for me, but it was my first experience, and some said it only happens once in a lifetime. I was eagerly awaiting this, anticipating the stories I would later tell my children. Different tales about it had been circulating.

“If you look directly at the sun, you will go blind,” some said.

Others had said, “If the sun touches you during the clash, you could develop skin cancer.”

“It shows that the world is coming to an end,” one of the preachers had explained.

“Until it happens, I will not believe it,” said a few who had taken a stand.

Our neighbour, Afam, who was known to be the *radio of the street*, had described it as the big fight between the Sun and the Moon. Where the Moon will fight to take the place of the Sun and, eventually, the Sun will slip beneath the ash and black cloud, slowly surrendering to the overpowering Moon, and darkness will dominate for a moment. But then, like a wounded soldier, the ancient Sun will rise, reappearing with rays of light and overshadowing the Moon to take back its glory.

Though the radio and television anchors had described it in scientific terms that I could not understand, Afam’s description made more sense to me. In my mind's eye, I could see a heavy fight between the two celestial bodies, where they would rumble with thunder and lightning,

confusion, and darkness. I could see my classmates and I running outside to see the great clash, probably cheering for one. Even with my expectation, I prayed silently that they would not crash on us.

I was told that it was a rare privilege to see it; the last time it happened in Nigeria was around the 1940s before independence, but most people did not understand what it was then. My grandmother had confirmed this narrative. She recounted being on the farm, back in our hometown, on a very bright sunny day, when suddenly everything grew dark. She initially thought it was about to rain and began to gather her farm implements, but then the sky grew even darker than normal rainy clouds. They feared that the world was coming to an end. The voices of mothers could be heard calling out to their children, and goats bleated, searching for the ways to their pens. Then suddenly, the hidden Sun made its appearance again, and the whole place brightened up. This event influenced the coinage of the popular Igbo adage used for rare occurrences: “*Chi enwere ehihie jie* - The night has come in the daytime.

On the morning of that fateful day, most of my classmates and I arrived with high expectations, ready to witness what we expected to be the most memorable event of our lifetime. The class attendance was reduced as some of us were absent that day. We later learnt that some parents prevented their children from going to school due to fears of the unknown. Some of us came with sunglasses but were disappointed to learn that they were not the right glasses. Luckily, the school provided eclipse glasses for each of the teachers.

When it was almost time, the once sunny skies grew darker, as if it was about to rain heavily. The whole school erupted in excitement. Some rushed to the window to see what was

happening outside, and others stayed behind, taking it in. Everyone was talking at the same time. The teachers stood outside with their glasses peeping at what was happening in the sky.

Teacher Ozor asked those who were interested in watching the eclipse to line up outside the classroom. I joined some of my classmates who were brave enough to stand outside. When it was my turn, my teacher put the glasses on me, and there I saw a half-lonely yellowish moon or sun standing there, alone by itself, surrounded by dark clouds. I didn't know which one I saw, but I knew that there was no kicking! No fighting! No lightning! No thunder! Just something that looked like the light from a kerosene lamp. After what seemed like a minute or more, the glass was taken from me for another person to use. In that moment, all I wanted was to walk away, go home, curl up on my bed, and say nothing to anyone. After weeks of hoping, dreaming, and preparing, all I saw was a tiny light up there.

I quietly entered the classroom and sat down without saying anything, pondering what had just occurred. I wondered if I missed the main action because of the eclipse glasses. *Or did they lie to us?*

Later, we discovered that only a few states had experienced a full eclipse; what we had witnessed was a partial one. Despite the disappointment, I was happy to have joined the ranks of those, like my grandmother, who had experienced an eclipse in their lifetime. Although partial and lunar eclipses later occurred in Nigeria in 2013 and 2018, respectively, they were not visible in Enugu State.

I thought I had missed the chance to witness it for the second time, unaware that I would experience it again 18 years later, in a place far from home.

7th April 2024

Drivers driving, workers working, and students returning from school. Corner Brook wore a look of excitement, like something was eagerly being expected, like the coming of a notable person, and indeed, something was expected. It seemed like all the residents of the city were outside. Nobody was trying to hide from the blazing Sun, and it was unusually bright and warm, a quick change from the hazy and chilly late-winter conditions that lingered in Corner Brook. At 3:30 PM, I left my apartment to catch the Corner Brook City Transit bus to the plaza on the outskirts of the city, the event's rendezvous point, where it was expected to happen around 5:00 PM.

As the bus approached Brookfield Avenue, there was a heavy stream of cars heading towards Confederation Drive, the main highway leading to the plaza. The cars crawled slowly like snails that were tired of their journey. Passengers hissed and murmured as the driver had no other option than to join the *crawling* vehicles heading towards the plaza.

At 4:05 PM, at the intersection of Brookfield Avenue and West Valley Road, it seemed that the usual free-flow traffic of Corner Brook came to an unusual standstill.

“The eclipse has started,” someone announced from the back of the bus. The sky had indeed begun to dim. I resisted the strong urge to get off the bus and walk the rest of the way.

Luckily, we made it out of the jam and later emerged at Confederation Drive heading toward the plaza. Another brief traffic delay followed as more cars poured into the plaza's parking lot, overlooking the city. Through the bus windows, I could see crowds of people milling around,

wearing their eclipse glasses. Once the bus stopped, I hurried toward a corner of the plaza where people were gathered, just in time to snag one of the last pairs of glasses and a free cup of coffee.

The crowd patiently waited for the solar eclipse. News of the event had been broadcast widely by major mass media across North America, as well as by local media outlets in Corner Brook, where I had arrived six months earlier for a two-year master's program. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the big day, and many had already ordered eclipse glasses in advance.

Eclipse glasses in the left hand and coffee in the right hand, I joined the swarm of people pacing around the parking lot and stopping for a minute to peek at the sky. Cars moved slowly, drivers peeping through windows, searching for available spots to park. Everybody was ready for the peak of the eclipse. Parents held their children, teenagers moved from one part of the park lot to the other, the elderly slowly walked with their walkers to meet their folks, workers arrived with their work clothes, and some, like me, talked while waiting for the main action.

“I remembered that it happened years ago while I was in Nigeria... can't remember the details,” said Abiodun, one of the Nigerians that I met in Corner Brook, and we had agreed to meet at the plaza with her children to view the eclipse together.

I put on my glasses. Still, for reasons I couldn't explain, I found myself expecting dramatic signs, a rumbling sky, perhaps lightning or thunder. In truth, I barely understood what a solar eclipse was and hadn't bothered to research it.

At first, all I saw was darkness. Thinking I had worn the glasses wrong, I adjusted them, but still, only darkness.

"Just wear them like normal sunglasses," a man standing close to me said. I did as he instructed.

"Then look straight up at the sky. See anything?"

"Yes... I think that's the Sun," I answered.

"That's it."

I kept staring up at the sun, now a brilliant yellow like the light from a kerosene lamp, surrounded by dark and light ash clouds. It looked like a great Iroko tree standing alone in a mystical sky. I guess the real eclipse was yet to start, and so we waited. We waited and greeted a few familiar faces, chatted, and waved at passersby.

At about 5:05 PM, the sun was nearly fully obscured by the moon. Only a thin rim of sunlight was visible around the moon's dark silhouette.

"My fingers are freezing," Abiodun, who was standing beside me, observed. And truly, the air had gradually grown cooler, and the parking lot darker, as people excitedly used their eclipse glasses to see what was happening up there. No fighting! No lightning! No thunder! Just the same old sun covered by black clouds.

"I read that the next major eclipse will be visible in Asia," someone nearby announced, snapping me out of my thoughts.

Turning to Abiodun. "Maybe I'll be living in Asia by then, or at least travel there to see it," I said, jokingly.

"Hopefully," she replied, smiling thoughtfully, "Or maybe you'll witness it in Nigeria in 2034."

After a few more minutes, the dark sky slowly yielded to the sun's light again, and the weather began to warm up.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A Bible verse kept echoing in my thoughts like a song on repeat mode.

With the whole place brightened up, the once-filled parking lot began to thin down as if nothing had happened. We lingered a little longer, savouring the moment before heading back.

Here or there, same sun, same moon ... maybe different eclipse.

2.9 What do you see?

At the traffic stop. In the middle of the freezing winter. The weather was biting, sending chills down my bones. I had my burgundy winter jacket on, along with well-padded boots. My hands were covered with thick leather gloves and an ashy hat. They were not enough to shield my shaking body from the wind that seemed to be freezing my blood and all the liquids in me. Uninvited tears flowed freely from my eyes, and my nose was filled with mucus that I kept pushing back. With the jacket hood on and the zipper zipped up to my chin, one could barely identify me from afar.

Traffic lights turned red, cars came to a halt, and I made my way to the other side of the road with my hands in my pockets. As I stepped off the road, turning towards my street, beside Corner Market, I heard voices from my right, among the lined-up cars that were waiting for the

traffic light. Out of them all was a black AWD with the windows fully down and two heads peeping at me. I could see a man, probably in his mid-thirties, with a vape pen in his hand and the driver, a lady, vaping heavily amidst smoke that nearly covered her.

“Why...back to where you came from!” He shouted at me, with an accent that was too fast for me to catch. His head was already out of the car, looking at me without blinking, maybe waiting for my reaction.

I stood still without a response, staring at them as the traffic lights turned green. He then made another statement that had words like “another man’s land,” and they sped off.

And thousands of thoughts and questions ran through my mind.

What do you see?

What do you think?

when you see me

In a place,

away from mine.

Inside the hospital. A room shared by four male patients with four beds placed at the four corners of the room and curtains demarcating them. I walked in with gloves on my hands to begin the day's work. I started with the patient closer to the left-hand side of the door, then proceeded to the patient beside him. He was an elderly man, likely in his late eighties, awaiting admission to the long-term care facility. I had known him since I began working at the hospital. I remember he complained about how my generation of health workers wastes gloves by constantly changing them.

“Waste! waste! waste!” He would murmur.

As I approached him, he adjusted his seat and sat up straight.

“Hello!”

“Hello! Are you my doctor?” he asked with all seriousness.

“No. I am the housekeeper.”

He strained his left ear towards me and asked, “You are not my doctor?”

“Yes, I am a housekeeper!” I raised my voice and lips towards him.

“If you are not my doctor, who are you?” he asked in confusion. “The nurse?”

“She is the cleaner.” Another patient, a middle-aged man staying closer to his bed, drew the curtain aside and joined us, speaking louder, almost into his ear.

“Oh!” Said the first man. He was taken aback and looked visibly surprised. “You should be my doctor, not cleaner.”

“I know,” I said, smiling sheepishly at him. “I would have made a good one.”

“You should be a doctor.” You should be a doctor,” he continued and then paused. “Is ya married, my dear? If ya isn't, I can find ya a right good Newfoundland man.”

The room burst into laughter as if we were waiting for his words.

And thousands of thoughts and questions ran through my mind.

What do you see?

What do you think?

when you see me

In a place

away from mine.

At my part-time job. On one of the days of the summer season, I walked into the supervisor's office and met one of the newly hired supervisors. A man, likely in his late fifties or early sixties, with veins thrusting out of his skin like a bodybuilder. Smiles and laughter seemed to be far away from him.

I signed the attendance sheet and waited for him to assign a unit to me. He struck up the familiar conversation of *Where are you from? How long have you been here?*

"From Nigeria," I replied without hesitation. "For about six months."

"So, what brought you here?" I adjusted myself to answer the question that I have answered countless times, but he continued, "Canadian money? Boyfriend? Trouble at home..."

Visibly taken aback, I watched as he rattled off his questions like a detective working to uncover a dark secret. I stared blankly at him, trying to make meaning out of his words.

"I am a student at the university," I said after much hesitation.

He was silent for a second. His left eyebrow slightly curved, and in a split second, his face went from shock to disappointment and to detestation. He quickly turned his lips to something that looked like a smile.

"Oh! Wow! Nice!" He said as he handed me the task sheet for the day.

"What are you studying in school?" he asked as I made my way to the door. I was not ready to entertain another question, but...

"I am doing my master's." I quickly responded and walked away without looking back.

And thousands of thoughts and questions ran through my mind.

What do you see?

What do you think?

when you see me

In a place

away from mine.

2.10 A Closer Meeting

It was my first time in the Lily unit, located on the fifth floor of the Long-Term Care building. I parked the housekeeping cart in front of the second room, on the right-hand side of the unit, knocked and waited to hear “come in,” but I only heard a whispering sound. I opened the door slightly and peeped inside to see if the resident, or any of the caregivers, was there, but I did not see anyone. The light was turned off, and the room was warmer than the corridor. I could see the tiny red light of a radio in the right-hand corner of the room, and the voice of a talk-radio host was echoing gently. The walls were grey, with golden curtains hanging by the sides, giving a clearer view of the snow gently falling outside.

I put on a glove, entered inside and switched on the light. Someone was lying on the bed, covered in a blanket, facing away from the door. I presumed that was the occupant, probably asleep. I couldn't help but notice the pictures on top of the dresser and the hangings on the walls. There were old wedding pictures, pictures of children, and young and older adults. On the wall opposite the door, various complimentary cards for birthdays, Easter, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Get-well-soon were pasted. One of the cards said *I love you, Grandma* in a child's handwriting with drawn heart emojis. Another with bold italicised letters said:

Though years have passed,

Your eyes have become dim,

The memories of us are fading,

Your health is fading,

But your presence radiates the room.

You are still my mother.

I LOVE YOU, MUM.

As I drew nearer to gather the garbage, the full view of the figure unfolded before me. There she lay, peacefully on the mattress, snuggled in the flower-patterned quilt blanket. Soft silver strands of hair that looked uncombed spread all over her face. Her eyes remained closed, while delicate wrinkles formed patterns across her face and gently pursed lips, exuding calmness.

I quietly collected the garbage and returned to the cart, dipped my hand inside the bucket, picked up a wet towel and hurriedly began to wipe the high-touch areas. I bent down to wipe food crumbs off the table and proceeded to the bed rails and then the cupboard. My mind rummaged through the remaining tasks for the day, wondering if I could finish the work on my Task Sheet before closing time. After work, I would stop at one of the stores at Murphy Square for groceries. Hopefully, it would have stopped snowing by then. *No, I shouldn't walk outside on this cold snowy day, or I should probably go home, straight from work and use whatever foodstuff I had before it spoiled. Oh! I have a class in the evening. Ouch! I forgot to check with the supervisor if the monthly complete cleaning has been done in this room. I have started already. I had to choose another room for complete cleaning. My rent is due today!*

I was still in deep thought when I heard a broken, soft, shrill, and confused voice beside me.

“You are a stranger.” The voice said.

I looked up, and my eyes met a tired, startled face. I mumbled a "hi" and forced a smile, but she did not respond. She used her right hand to push back her hair and kept blinking her eyes, staring at me. I was familiar with that gaze; I had seen it on many Long-Term Care residents' faces. I stood motionless, unsure of what to say. *What if she screams like one of the residents did? What if she calls me a thief?* A lot of thoughts ran through my mind. I silently prayed it wouldn't come to that. I was too tired for drama. After what seemed like an eternity, she slowly rose from the bed and supported her weight with her left elbow, tilting to one side of the bed.

"You are a stranger," she said again.

I was taken aback. "No, I work here," I replied, wondering if she would understand my accent, given my struggles with the Newfoundland dialect. I gradually resumed my work as she did not respond, planning to tidy up most of the rooms before lunchtime. Over time, I had learned to keep my interaction with the patients or residents brief, wary of the uncomfortable and personal questions that sometimes arose.

"Who are you?" she asked, still staring at me, surprisingly calm. I stood still, facing her fully, introduced myself and explained what I was doing in her room as she continued to glare in disbelief.

"You are not real. Are you?"

"I... am...real.". I stammered and stood confused.

"My mind is playing with me again." She stretched out her hands towards me and continued, "Come, let me touch you, if you are real." I stood still. No movement. Looked at the door, hoping that any of the caregivers would miraculously appear at the door. "Please," she added.

"Alright," I said, walking slowly towards her, and stretched out my right arm, curving it at the elbow to avoid touching her with my wet glove palm. She reclined on the mattress and grasped my arm. Her hand appeared thinner, with delicate veins visible beneath the skin. With her right hand, she explored my arm, stroking it gently while maintaining her hold. I felt the tickling sensation of her touch and attempted to suppress the laughter bubbling up inside me.

"It is true, you are real," she said in awe.

Her touch sent a peculiar electric feeling across my skin. I couldn't suppress it any longer and burst into laughter.

"Of course I am real."

"I am sorry, my love." Her voice was shaking. She pronounced "my love" with the Newfoundland accent that I have heard several times.

"It's just that..." she hesitated, still holding my hand. "I only see people of your colour from afar." She heaved a sigh, "I have always looked forward to being close to one." I smiled without saying anything. Her palm was mixed with softness and roughness that spoke of years that she had passed through that I am yet to. I could feel the warmth of her touch.

"Here, I am." I finally said as she gradually let go of my hand and I resumed my work.

"You are so beautiful." Her tone was calm and gentle.

"Thank you." Her eyes followed the movement of my hand as I wiped the remaining corners of the room.

"Where are you from?"

"Nigeria."

“That's far away,” she said, “How long have you been in Newfoundland?”

Turning to answer her, I saw that she was almost dozing off, “about six months.”

“Cold?” she asked in a tired tone.

“Very cold.”

“You will get used to it, my Darling.” She said with her eyes closed.

“Hopefully.”

Silence descended upon the room, and the voice of the radio host continued as I mopped the floor. The falling snow outside the building had slowed, and the hazy sky had become clearer. After mopping the floor, restocking the toiletries, and checking the room, I gathered the debris by the door and took another glance at her; she was already deeply asleep. I gently shut the door, returned my working tools to the cart and pushed it to the next door, where I met a totally different resident, in words and in manner.

2.11 The Oldest Person I have met.

"Hi," I greeted the two women in the room. One was lying down on the bed, while the other was sitting beside her. The seated one looked much younger than the one on the bed, with little resemblance between them. The younger one wore vibrant red lipstick, black trousers, and a flowered blouse to complement her look. I guessed she was in her sixties.

“Hello!” they replied in unison.

“How are you today?” I asked the oldest, who was lying down on the bed with a newspaper

in her hand. I guessed she was the occupant of the room. She looked at me quizzically, looking directly at my lips. I noticed the hearing aids in her ears. I repeated myself, this time adding more volume.

“I am still alive and breathing.” Though her voice was coarse and shaky, I could sense the humour in her tone, which I responded to with a smile.

“I am here to clean your room.”

“Alright. Carry on, dear,” replied the younger woman.

I buried myself with the work at hand: packed the garbage in the room and the bathroom, wiped the high-touch surfaces and washed the bathroom. The two women whispered at intervals with a sense of close connection.

“It’s beautiful weather today, huh?” “the younger woman asked as I picked up the mopstick to mop the floor.

“Yes, glad the sun is out.” Truly, I was happy with the day’s weather. After months without sunlight, I was eagerly anticipating the arrival of Spring. She raised her legs as I cleaned the part of the floor where she was sitting.

“How long have you been in Corner Brook?” Unconsciously, I was expecting the question and other questions like *Where are you from? Do you have a family here? Why did you choose Corner Brook? Do you miss home? Do you like it here? Do you have any kids?* I have gotten accustomed to these questions that I have answers before being asked. I replied to her question.

“It must be a huge change for you, especially with the cold and snow.” I noticed that I understood her accent easily, and she understood mine.

“Yes, I am really looking forward to the Summer.”

“I am also trying to adjust to Newfoundland’s snow,” she said, taking a sip from her coffee mug. “I came back here last year, after years of living in Ontario.”

“Yes, we don’t have a choice,” I said and couldn’t resist the urge to ask her the question that I wanted to ask when I entered the room.

“Is she your mum?” I asked, looking at the woman on the bed.

“Yes, she is my mum.” She nodded her head up and down.

“I thought as much.”

“She is 106 years old, almost 107.”

I paused for a few seconds to digest what she just said. I looked at the woman on the bed who was glued to the newspaper in her hand, without an eyeglass.

“106, you said?”

“Yes, 106,” nodding her head and smiling at the same time. “And I will be 84 this year.”

“What!!” I couldn’t hide my shock. I stopped mopping and stared in awe. “You must have strong gene.”

“I guessed it’s in the blood. My mum’s mother died at the age of a hundred,” she said, still smiling. “Apart from my mum’s hearing and a few health issues, she is still strong.”

I kept nodding my head, looking from mother to child and from child to mother. “It’s really an honour to meet you both.” The mother smiled at me, and the daughter said something like “thank you.” I was too dumbfounded to remember what she said.

I later picked up my mopping stick from where I kept it and resumed my work. I left the room, smiling sheepishly as I tried to digest the encounter. Of course, she was the oldest person I have ever met.

2.12 Closer to the Ocean

It was melodic. It was beckoning. Like metal drawn by a magnetic force, we obeyed. Sitting in a circle with the flame burning from the logs lit in the middle of the group, the reflection of the flames discreetly revealed the faces of everyone seated on the makeshift sitting area on the rocky Bonne Bay beach.

We were surrounded by thick darkness except for the flames from the campfire and lights shining from houses a little farther away. The sound of the vast expanse of deep blue, transparent sea broke the stillness of the night with its composition that is not a symphony nor anything man-made, but purely the work of nature. *Water! Water* hitting the rocks and the stones, waves rising, and tides coming toward us were purely blissful. The silhouette of pine trees and Burnt Hill that we hiked in the daytime could be seen in the distance as the sky hovered over it like a bird protecting its young ones.

Our shining faces revealed people from different cultures, nationalities, and races gathered close to the ocean. A closer look could hint at our diverse backgrounds. We were mostly what people called “International Students.” Pakistan, Ghana, USA, Cuba, China, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Brazil, Barbados, Iran and several provinces across Canada all sat close to the ocean of Newfoundland.

It wasn't my first time being among people from diverse cultures or ethnic backgrounds, but it was the first time I found myself surrounded by individuals of different skin colours and nationalities. Since arriving in this new place, countless questions have been running through my mind: *How do I fit in here? Will I be able to connect with others? Did I make the right choice?* But this short trip beside the ocean provided a little relief. We had arrived at Norris Point the day before as part of our school trip. That morning, we hiked the Burnt Hill Trail, exploring the area full of pine trees

Most of us reached the peak of the trail, while a few others found it too steep to climb and decided to turn back. From the peak, the vastness of the ocean stretched as far as our eyes could see. Occasionally, an excited tuna could be seen jumping up and back into the sea. A boat tour in the afternoon, around the bay, gave us a beautiful view of the surrounding towns. And this night, we had a bonfire beside the beach that was open to anyone interested in participating or joining.

"Okay, guys... Alright... Apart from the weather, what other differences have you noticed?" Our coordinator's voice quieted the excitement that had followed the last speaker's comment. We avidly narrated our experiences with the weather of our new place. Everyone had something to say. Some experienced snow for the first time, while others were amazed by the sudden change of the colours of the landscape in fall, while a few pointed out that it was colder with more snow than where they came from.

As part of the bonfire night, everyone was expected to ask a question, and we took turns answering.

"The food. It's totally different from what I eat back home," said one of the students.

“Pine trees. A lot of them,” answered the next person.

“The houses,” someone noted. “They’re made with wood and painted with every colour imaginable, more than the rainbow.”

“Coffeeeee!” Someone exclaimed, drawing laughter from the group. “Everybody drinks coffee here!” The group again erupted in excitement. It seemed as if everyone was talking at the same time.

“The soil,” I said, when it was my turn. “Its colour is so different. It’s kind of grey, unlike the red earth in Nigeria.”

“Yeah! True! True!” One of the Ghanaian students concurred with it. “I was looking out for *real* soil when I got here, not realising *that* was the colour.”

As more people shared their experiences, my eyes wandered to the vast stretch of water beside us. Beautiful deep greenish blue by day, and by night, it became dark, haunting and full of mystery, accompanied by a melodious sound. “So, what was your culture shock?” someone asked.

“They smile a lot, even at strangers, I think it’s a form of greeting here,” someone noted.

“Those smiles? Fakes!” Came a voice from behind.

“But some are genuine, you know”

“Don’t be deceived by that!”

“I know, but I have met strangers who smiled at me and genuinely offered help or a ride.”

“And I have met people who kept smiling while throwing insults at me.”

Voices erupted. It seemed like everyone had something to say about who smiled and who did not smile, about fake or real. Loud laughter could be heard from some quarters, while some debated with all seriousness, and others just listened. This went on for a few minutes before the coordinator quieted the conversation.

“Alright! Next question, please.”

“Let’s talk about you. What do you miss most about the place you call home?”

An involuntary silence settled over us. Someone placed the last piece of wood on the fire. As its flame dimmed, the sounds of the ocean and the crackling wood echoed gently around us. It was like a moment of reflection as we thought about the place and the people we left behind in pursuit of knowledge. A few have been here for more than four years, some more than a year, while most of us just arrived.

As I reflected on the place I call home, I knew that if I began to speak of all the memories and the things I missed, time would fail me. I couldn’t say I missed one thing more than the other. Each memory, each moment, held its own special place in my heart. In the end, all I could say was, “I miss the people.”

Again, my eyes wandered off to the ocean beside us as the tide swung back and forth, crashing against the rocky shore and producing a rhythm pleasing to the ears. I remember how I could see the waves during the day. They formed zigzagging lines, as if broken and rearranged according to their ranks. *What if I step into the sea and feel its embrace and allow its tide to carry me, to rise and fall with its waves until it takes me back home ... I could imagine the reaction of my family when they see me dripping in water, standing at our doorstep.* I quickly retraced my

thoughts back to the group as others talked about the place they call home. Emotions were heightened as we nostalgically recounted memories of home. A lot was said. A lot was heard. Laughter and moments of sadness were felt. Sitting with the group, I felt the deep connection, the admiration for *this new place*, the longing for home and an unspoken uncertainty about the future.

“For seven years! You haven’t been home?” someone asked the coordinator, who had just shared a bit of his own story. “Don’t you get homesick?”

“I do,” he said, smiling uneasily. “But there are reasons beyond my control that prevent me from going back.”

“How do you stay? I mean, how do you make this place feel like home when you know it’s not?”

He sat in silence for a while, staring down at the dimming flame. His countenance was like someone who was in deep thought, unaware of the murmuring around him.

“I guess ... I guess,” he said slowly, rubbing his head. “You try to make it a home away from home.”

A home away from home. That phrase stayed with me. I thought back to the times I had travelled before, how I struggled to adapt, met people and eventually had to leave. But this time felt different, it was farther away, across the seas. *Would this time be different, too? Who among us would stay? Who would leave?*

We played one last game as the burning woods gradually turned to ashes and the night grew colder. Then we left the rocky beach, the sound of the ocean lingering in our ears, and returned to our boarding house.

Chapter 3

Summary

The thesis begins by presenting an overview of its key concepts, focusing on literary arts as a medium for cross-cultural exchange. It then reviews relevant literature by scholars and Nigerian creative writers whose works support this idea. The thesis argues that these writings are not merely fictional narratives, but vessels that carry the experiences and cultural identities of their authors. It further outlines the objective of the thesis: to produce well-narrated creative works that bring these concepts to life.

Chapter Two consists of twelve interconnected short stories that express different responses to migration, including pride in one's culture, ambivalence about leaving, where loss is mixed with hope for the future, and the discovery of unexpected cultural connections. The early stories describe a place, Nigeria, and the ideology of inclusivity and oneness that is expected in an egalitarian society. As the chapter progresses, themes of migration and cultural identity begin to emerge, revealing the journey of a particular people as they gradually move from their original home to a new one, Canada, with an entirely different culture, mindset, and climate.

Using multiple narrations and characters, the thesis examines the journey of migration and its impact on the individual's family, culture, identity, and sense of place. It also employs diverse writing styles, depicting the environments and climates of the two settings, while incorporating the Igbo language to provide a deeper perspective on the migration.

Works Cited

- Adekoya, Ibukunoluwa, and Sinacore L. Ada. "The Career Transitioning Experiences of Nigerian Economic Immigrants in Canada: Reliance on Christian Faith and Personal Agency." *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1 – 23.
- Adichie, Chimamanda N. *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- *** *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2019.
- Afenfia, Michael. *Leave my Bone in Saskatoon*. Griots Lounge, 2023.
- Agnew, Vijay. *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity : A Search for Home*. University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Akbar, Arifa. "Ayiti by Roxane Gay — island views" *The Financial Times Limited*, 2018.
- Banda, Fareda. *African Migration, Human Rights and Literature*. Hart Publishing, 2020.
- Bello, Ty. "Greenland." *Greenland*. Energize Music, 2008. *YouTube App*.
youtu.be/SiwIFAHcJPA?si=fZa3cru6De2yXD3O
- Clair, Michael. *Immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador: how it works, how it worked and how it might work*. The Harris Centre, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2021.
- De Caluwé, Johan, et al. "Language, culture and meaning: Cross-cultural semantics." *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 1, John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2004, pp. 127-148.

“Discover our People and Culture.” *Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism*.

www.newfoundlandlabrador.com/about-this-place/people-and-culture/ Accessed 29 Aug. 2025.

Ekwealor, Paul E. “The Principle of Egbe Bere, Ugo Bere as Igbo Contribution to Harmonious Co-existence in Nigeria.” *International Journal of Novel Researches in Humanities, Social Sciences and Management* Vol. 2, no. 1, 2019, pp. 9-16.
<https://publications.oasisinternationaljournal.org/index.php/Ijnhssm/article/view/17/15>

Emecheta, Buchi. *Second Class Citizen*. Allison and Busby. 1974.

Gay, Roxane. *Ayiti*. Grove Prints, 2018.

Jegede, Oladele O. “Pragmatic Exploration of Cross-Cultural Encounters in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*.” *Cross-Cultural Communication*. CSCanada, vol. 20, no. 2. 2024, pp. 101-108.

www.cscanada.net/index.php/cce/article/view/13460

Kumar, Alka and Triandafyllidou, Anna, editors. “Between Critical Writing and Creative Writing.” *Migration and Identity through Creative Writing: Stories: Strangers to Ourselves*. Springer Nature, 2024.

Manolachi, Monica. “Donald W. Winnicott’s Theory, Literature, and Migration.” *Cluj-Napoca Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, Vol.7, no. 2, 2021, pp.151-168.

Murphy, Rodríguez E. “New Transatlantic African Writing: Translation, Transculturation and Diasporic Images in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Americanah*.” *Prague Journal of English Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2017.

Nash, Johnny. “I Can See Clearly Now.” *I Can See Clearly Now*. Performed by Jimmy Cliff, *Cool Running*, 1995. *YouTube App*.
youtu.be/MrHxhQPOO2c?si=VnrттUL_15Kaa1yv/

Niedenthal, Paula M., et al. “Historical Migration Patterns Shape Contemporary Cultures of Emotion.” *Perspectives on psychological science*, Vol. 14, Sage Publications, 2019, pp.560-573