

## A PSYCHOANALYTIC PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS IN DIASPORIC AFRICAN SHORT STORIES

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### **Abstract**

This study explores a psychoanalytic portrayal of characters in selected diasporic African short stories. The short stories focused on in this study are selected from various anthologies. These short stories have been written by writers of African descent currently living in the Diaspora. The study considers Diaspora to refer to dispersion of African immigrants in the world and their orientation to their homeland, Africa. Therefore, unlike the historically uprooted descendants during slavery, some of the writers emigrated to the Diaspora in search of employment, education or as a result of marriage.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Psychoanalytic, Illusory Types, Resentful Types and Resilient Types.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper looks at types of characters that seem to stand out in diasporic African short stories. Swain Dwright (2008) hypothesizes that writers decide what characters achieve in their stories and therefore, they “provide them with enough characteristics to make it seem plausible they should do it” (8). Therefore, he seems to suggest that characters’ motivation arise from authors’ desire to shape characters in a specific pattern that is not necessarily drawn from their personal experiences. He adds:

Specifically, in the act of thinking through a story the writer temporarily suspends his own standards and adopts those of someone else. That is what a writer does when he creates a character. Because he is in the character creation business, he must learn to put his own beliefs and

attitudes in the limbo temporarily and adopt those of someone else: the person he's writing, the character he is creating (11).

Swain seems to suggest that writers are in a position to develop traits of a character that readers easily single out not from their own experiences but also through observation of the society. He notes that through the development of characters' sex, age, vocation and manners, the authors determine either directly or indirectly their character by describing their appearance, actions, dialogues and thoughts. According to him, character traits are determined by what goes on in the mind of characters, what makes them tick and their predictable future plans.

To add to that, Swain suggests that explanation of characters' behavior depends on their motivation and happiness. According to him, motive refers to "a mental force that induces an act, intention or purpose that leads to the kind of life that a character enjoys" (33). Therefore, he seems to suggest that the internal forces within characters shapes their destiny as they struggle to fulfill their dreams. Internal forces unconsciously determine their key character traits. He adds that whatever obstructs characters quest for happiness, largely contributes to the formation of their behavior.

Based on what Swain suggests above, we can conclude that character traits in diasporic African short stories are determined by their motivation and quest for happiness which can be distinguished in terms of their illusions, resentment and resilience. Our study takes interest in this positing, therefore, has decided to study characters based on these traits.

## 2. ILLUSORY TYPES

Contentment, determination and skepticism are some of the key characteristics of illusory types of characters in diasporic African short stories. Writers depict characters who engage in abstract thoughts to make their hopeless state tolerable.

Characters are portrayed as living in unpleasant environmental conditions in Africa and have to venture into a new land not only to survive but also to escape abject poverty and misery. Therefore, for many, the Diaspora is an avenue to change their lives. They have strong wish fulfillment elements that characterize their lives and their warring emotions are witnessed in each step they take. In their illusions they seem to reflect the present political alignments that have terribly hindered their path to self fulfillment. This is the kind of situation that can be traced in EC Osondu's short story, "Waiting", NonViolet Buluwayo's short story, "Hitting Budapest" and Ngugi wa Mukoma's short story, "How Kamau wa Mwangi Escaped to Exile".

To start with, Osondu's short story, "Waiting", depicts characters' deep longing to leave their country. Their irresistible desire has been necessitated by a civil war in their country. The narrator and his age mates are in a refugee camp set up by the Red Cross. They are known by the names on their t-shirts and the town of their origin. For instance, the narrator is named Orlando Zaki. The first name inscribed on his t-shirt while the second name, is town where he was picked from. They are anxiously waiting for a photographer to take their photos and then display them abroad hoping that they will be adopted by an admirer.

London, one of their camp mates left for London as his t-shirt indicated after receiving an admirer from that country. They also hope that as their t-shirts indicate, Orlando and Acapulco, they will be adopted in Florida and Mexico respectively. However, Sister Nola depicts their state as that of Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*:

She says people in the text are waiting for God to come and help them. Here in the camp, we wait some more. It is the only thing we do. We wait for the food trucks to come and then we form a straight line and then we

wait a few minutes for the scatter, then we wait for the fight to begin, and then we fight and struggle and bite and kick and curse and tear and grab and run (56).

This demonstrates that they are hopeless as they wait for a savior from another land. Largely, as they are in the camp, they have to struggle to have the basic needs and it all depends on how one is quick to respond to the arrival of relieve food. Others have perished for being weak and losing hope for a better tomorrow. For them, at least they are not only waiting for food but also bank their hope on the photographer and chances of going abroad.

To add to that, Orlando and Acapulco are worried that if their parents will ever trace them after the war. They express their fear that the Red Cross has a hidden agenda for sending them to America. The reasons that Red Cross advances such as that they do not join the youth brigade, shoot, kill, rape or destroy properties does not satisfy them. They view their aim to save their lives as a wider scope to make them slaves.

Acapulco wishes he had a dog to pose with it as he takes a photo because Americans love dogs. They recall how they killed a number of black dogs for food even if they had protected them during times of plenty. This was when the Red Cross's plane could not land because the warlords demanded the consignment to be delivered to them. He laments: 'We were so hungry we killed a few dogs and used to make them pepper soup. A few days later, the Red Cross people were let through and food came. The dogs were a bit wary, but they seemed to understand that it was not our fault' (58). Therefore, it was not their wish to kill the dogs but because they lacked food.

Forced to live in the camp, Acapulco and Orlando seem to be daydreaming in a dialogue. When Acapulco emphasizes on the civil war in their country, Orlando seems to be in a trance responding as if he is in America and how life be enjoyable in Los Angeles. They wonder if they will be accommodated since they are displaced and cannot trace where their families are. They note that those who travel abroad are with their families unlike them.

In summary, Orlando and Acapulco fantasize leaving their homes and their hopelessness state is equated to Samuel Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Basic necessities are inadequate and are forced to rely on donations and dog meat as the devastating effects of war rages on in their country. They fantasize to live in America where they will cook with electricity and wonder if the whites will accept their ugly faces and adopt them. This seems to suggest that they have low esteem because of the colour casting their hopes of leaving their war torn country. On the same note, Buluwayo's short story, "Hitting Budapest" depicts characters that are tormented by their illusions and wish to leave their mother countries.

First, we encounter an absent-minded narrator and his five friendly playmates aged between nine and twelve years visiting Budapest a rich neighborhood to search for guavas. The narrator depicts characters' humble background that acts as a key impetus in shaping their behavior and goals in life. They are adventurous as they leave their homes to search for food in distant places. Abject poverty and lack of parental care drives and determines goals that Bastard sets in her life.

The narrator and her playmates are conscientious and ambitious despite their tender age. Even if they are competing to pick the best guavas, they pause at intervals so as Bastard, a pregnant young girl aged ten years old, to rest so that she does not collapse as a result of exhaustion or fatigue. She was raped by her grandfather. Thus her playmates are sensitive and sympathetic.

Bastard is haunted by her grandfather's beastly act although she is morally anxious and guilty of what happened to her. However, her peers constantly remind her of her bitter experiences that she wishes to forget. The questions they keep on asking her are a reminder of what happened to her on that fateful day with her grandfather. She even avoids playing with them. This form of self-alienation indicates her desire to forget her painful memories.

As Freud argues, characters tend to repress their undesirable information and they are locked away in the unconsciousness and cannot be retrieved easily (Snowden 110). She employs this kind of strategy by asserting that she does not desire a baby at that time or something else apart from guavas. Such expressions reveal her inner anxieties of shunning such kind of discussions. Thus Bastard is melancholic and has resigned from her peers' activities.

Despite her state, Bustard is optimistic about her future. She fantasizes that when she grows up, she will not steal guavas but build a mansion and move in. This indicates her inner motives of working hard to do away with poverty that has characterized her entire life. That is why she also fantasizes about living in America with aunt Fostalina and engaging herself in income generating activities. Her wish to put to an end perpetual poverty that has dominated her family and that has shaped her life only against her wishes. Her desire to be like her aunt is an altruistic kind of projection where a character attempts to fulfill her wishes through internalizing somebody's image.

The aim of visiting Budapest, therefore, is not as a result of instinctual motivation to eat guavas but to have a glance at their illusion homes that have 'closed gates, doors and windows' (10). That is perhaps also why the narrator is keen to note that most people had left their country for 'better countries' abroad, a wish she also wishes to fulfill when she becomes an adult. It is not only Bastard who admires a different order of life. Sbho dreams of living in one of the Budapest houses that he describes as "a big blue house with a row of steps, flowers all around it" (15). He is emotionally angered when Bastard throws a guava that hits the house that he fantasizes. She accuses her of being jealousy in owning one of the best houses. The narrator is keen to note an optimistic tone in her voice. This suggests that she is certain that she will achieve her dreams and there are no doubts about that. They go an extra mile to wish to be married by men from Budapest because to them it is paradise. Even if other playmates suggest that she is not financially endowed to compete with women who are raised in Budapest or those who had left their country, they are eager and gleeful if such an incident happens.

In general, they are psychotic and introverts as they accept their fantasies and feelings to rule over them. Their conversation is centered on their dreams to move away from their country and engage themselves in money making activities abroad. Later, they would use their wealth to build villas either in Budapest, Los Angeles or Paris as Bastard vows. Thus from their conversation, we can note that these characters are tormented by their desires to unpin themselves from poverty. They recall often their teachers' teachings that over-emphasized the need to have education in order to make money. Thus they are relaxed and poised to achieve their goals if opportunities come their way. Even if they are threatened by the fear that they may go to America and never return, their persistence to achieve their goals is evident.

Fears of being attacked by terrorists or doing odd jobs such as working in 'nursing homes and cleaning poop' does not change their minds. All they want is to be in America. However, the ending of this short story is tragic. Bastard's suggestion that they sell the shoes of a woman who had hanged herself, and use the money to buy food is the epitome of the extent to which characters can be driven by their fantasies until they forgo their basic human qualities. She notes: "Listen did you notice how that woman's shoes look almost new? If we can get them we can sell

them and buy a loaf, or maybe even one-and-a-half, what can you say?”(20). As they turn and run to the scene excitedly, they are not scared to touch a corpse despite their age but are determined to make a living out of it. They want to transform the woman’s unfortunate act to a life sustaining event. This indicates the characters’ irresistible desire to satisfy their fantasies despite the circumstances that surround them.

According to Freud, people engage in fantasy and daydreaming in order to make life more bearable (Snowden 112). What Freud terms as “profound melancholic mental creations characterized by poetic beauty” (Lectures on Psychoanalysis). Therefore, we can argue that characters in works of art engage in discussions that are endeared towards alleviating their pain and suffering when they are unable to achieve their goals in life. In doing that, they are momentarily able to forget their current status and focus in what at that time appears pleasing and enjoyable.

Kamau and Odhiambo in Ngugi wa Mukoma’s short story, “How Kamau wa Mwangi Escaped to Exile” are pessimistic that their lives will be better if only they make it to the Diaspora. The incumbent is after their lives since they are members of the second liberation movement that has echoed their voices against tribalism and corruption in the government circles.

Thus, when they receive a tip off from unnamed army officer that they were going to be assassinated the following day, they flee their homes with an aim to make it to the Diaspora in order to save their lives. That was the only way they were going to keep their hopes alive in order to witness the birth of a new nation that they had been struggling for and enjoy the fruits associated with an emancipated society.

They were against the ill conceived perception that the status quo meant the best for their nation and thus no need to raise an alarm. At night Kamau had to flee:

Feeling his t-shirt and jeans clinging uncomfortably to his body like they were made out of wet rubber, he realized just how unprepared he had been for this moment. He would have been better off running in his nice trousers and shirt – they were lighter. He had thought running without a shirt but a quick look at his bare arms, sliced in a thousand places by thorns and dry branches, had convinced him to not take off. He did not mind the pain as sweat-drops rolled into the razor –thin crevices. The pain kept him alive. He realized that he had to stop soon. For the last two hours he had been running for crawl. He wanted to live. He came to a stream. He drank water (64).

The narrator seems to suggest that Kamau was shocked that finally the government was after his life and had to make a decision to flee or lose his at the time the nation wanted him most. Therefore, he had to run away in the dark without informing even his family members as a safeguard measure to keep that secret to his chest. The army officer who informed him of the intended plan to take their lives seemed to support their call for a better nation even if they were serving the nation in various capacities. He recalled the boldness of the army when he came at night to inform him of the hatched plot:

“Look,” the soldier had said to Kamau, “I...we don’t want to see more people dead. Especially young people and even though we anticipate more trouble from the likes like you, you professional agitators, this is our country and you are needed .Protect your selves and your friends. W e

shall deal with each other later .Like men...eye to eye. If you do not leave tonight, there's a chance you will be dead by tomorrow morning" (66).

The narrator seems to suggest that it is in Kamau that he saw life and hope for their nation. That is why he opted to risk his life and break the oath of government secrecy to reveal the villain plans to them. He also made the right decision to flee to unknown place where he could be stranger but save his life and witness a rebirth of his beloved nation since the colonizers left. Therefore, he kept pondering if he had made the right decision to be alive in exile where victory seemed to lie.

To sum up, fantasies seem to give characters freedom to express their desire to unchain themselves from poverty that has characterized their lives. Momentarily, fantasy seems to give them hope in situations that seem impossible to go through. They are able to freely reveal their plans if they were given an opportunity that they could implement like building houses and living in a politically stable environment. Therefore, their lives are as a result of their inability to live shed poverty or move to abroad where they hope their lives will change for better. Their irresistible desire to live a life beyond what they can achieve has made them melancholic and irrational in their actions.

### 3. RESENTFUL TYPES

Hostility, sulkiness and irritability are some of the key characteristics of resentful types of characters. The Diaspora is full of a number of overwhelming experiences that some of the characters are portrayed unable to cope up with. Therefore, they internally harbor their resentment towards the white dominated society. Their negative feelings and anger is noted in the manner in which they treat those that are close to them. This is the kind of situation that can be traced in Monique Kwachou's short story, "Afritude", Chimamanda Ngozi's short story, "My Mother, the Crazy African" and Namwall Serpell's short story, "Mzungu".

To start with, Elizabeth's mother in Kwachou's short story, "Afritude", is unable to adjust into the American culture and her frustrations can be noticed in the way she handles her daughter. Instead of examining herself and accepting that America society is different from Africa, she transfers her frustrations to her daughter and treats her with contempt. Despite Elizabeth's initial experiences in America when she first arrived, she later adopts and integrates fully in the American community unlike her mother who still reserved her African bred ideas. Unable to cope, her mother is unstable, hot-tempered and opts to send her daughter to Cameroon to revive her African roots. Elizabeth's thoughts depict her persistence to be in America despite her mother relentlessly urging her to move to Africa.

In the opening lines, Elizabeth describes herself as a fish in a pond that cannot be fished out indicating that without her American lifestyle she will definitely lose her identity and be a laughing stock in the entire society. According to Mcdougall (2000), the environment has powerful tools to shape and determine psychological characteristics of an individual (Harre 193). Therefore, we can argue that character traits of an individual are not inherited but designed by the environment one is brought up in. Therefore, Elizabeth has been brought up in the American society and to distance her from it would perhaps destabilize emotionally.

In a high-pitched tone, her mother reminds Elizabeth that she grew up in Cameroon where she was able to fetch water, feed her father's swine and sell corn at a tender age of twelve. In pointing out her daughter's early childhood life, she indicates her frustrations of what she thought America could offer. However, her daughter is unable either to emulate her behavior or follow a specific given family code of conduct she has given. To her, her daughter has rebelled

against her and she has been influenced by the society that she is being brought up in. Unlike her, who grew up in Africa where these chores were mandatory, America presents a different social order. She is not in a position to visualize how the American society has changed her daughter to be somebody different from the one she wanted to bring up.

She, in fact, regrets that her daughter, Elizabeth cannot even make her own bed, wash utensils and clean her room. If she had to carry out these duties, she demanded some payment. This makes her wonder the error she made up in her life as she brought her up. She laments:

“Where did I go wrong? Have I spoiled you? How could I? Did I not bring a hoe and a broom from my last trip to Cameroon, just to teach you how to sweep like a child should, instead of being lazy and using a vacuum cleaner? Her voice expresses her distaste... (127).

In asking her these questions, she reveals her thoughts about America as a society that has no mechanisms to nurture young minds. Instead of instilling values like hardworking, it tolerates laziness and indolence, vices that are unacceptable in the African set up. She blames the American society that she believes had spoiled her. What annoys her most is that her daughter engages in petty crimes such as shoplifting in order to be accepted in her peer group.

According to Freud, internal struggles like these would be attributed to irreconcilable wishes that appear in the unconscious, pushed out of the conscious with all its attached memories and forgotten because ‘ethical and other standards were the repressing forces’ and they could not be accepted because they could prolong the conflict (Lectures on Psychoanalysis). Therefore, we argue that Elizabeth’s mother could not tolerate her in America because her judgment of morality rested in what she learnt in Africa and could not accept a different order of life.

Elizabeth scorns her mother that she is going to die because of her conduct. Her spiteful attitude towards her mother is clear when she wishes a ceiling to cave and crush her. This is a clear sign that she vehemently rejects her mother’s plans to take her to Cameroon to be taught how Cameroonians behave. Also, her wish that her mother should die expresses her repressed ideas about Africa. As she says later, ‘home is where your heart is and my heart was definitely not in Cameroon’ (128). Thus, her home is in America, a country that has designed her behavior and dispelled her fears giving her hope and bright future yet her mother had different opinions calling her a criminal and uncultured girl.

Elizabeth recalls her first days when she arrived from Cameroon, having shaved her head and many wondered the type of cancer she was suffering from. In remembering her first days in the American society she intends to show the kind of transformation she had gone through since she intermingled in the new society and how she wishes not to be separated from it. For now she has fully integrated in the America society and any attempt to uproot her is like taking a fish out of water. Her leaving America would, therefore, threaten her survival.

Again Elizabeth recalls her aunt Bessen, who had described her mother’s actions as a justification of the idiom: You can take a man out of the village but never the village out of the man (127). Thus, she considers her mother’s devising on how to “resurrect the African” in her and “wipe away the entire American bred ideas’ that she considered outdated and barbaric” (127). Her mother insisted that she could not make her own choices for she was a toddler who ought to be guided. This in effect means that she desires to set her own destiny and it’s impossible to identify herself as a Cameroonian. She wonders how this can happen because she left Cameroon when she was a child and reminding her of her African lifestyle is like describing “hell” to her. This implies that she had rejected African ways and fully embraced the western lifestyles and could not turn to retrogressive ways.

However, Elizabeth saw American students as “geeks”, barbaric, wearing long black clothes that according to the African culture were meant for mourning or funeral services during her first days in American school. The students acted as robots because they spent most of their time playing games on computers and she judged them as social misfits. Thus, being an African, she at that time felt lonely, with no friends and unaccepted in school. However, things had changed from the time she came to America. She was now fully integrated in the American society and had adapted to their behavior and mannerisms.

Nevertheless, despite her resistance and persistence not to be taken to Africa, her mother finally convinced her to go back to Cameroon promising to take her to boarding school. She opted to leave as long as she was away from her mother. She fantasizes:

And as I lay on my bed, I consoled myself filling my mind with my ideas of what boarding school would entail: a room for me and another young girl. No mom, no chores, free to do as I liked. Didn't only rich kids go to boarding school? It ought to be something prestigious, right? It was going to be okay, everything would be great (129).

This suggests that she was happy to leave and free herself from the scolding chains of her mother. She yearned for freedom. She consoled herself by thoughts of making new friends from rich families.

It's only Elizabeth's uncle who was in a position to understand her. He inquired if she really desired to be in Africa. He considered her mature and thus in a position to make decisions that could shape her future. At the same time, her mother wondered why he was not leaving her alone to bring up children in a manner she wished to. She felt embarrassed and opted to pray to divert their attention without giving her a chance to explain herself. Prayers were means in which she was able to express her anxieties and release her tension that were building within her. The narrator notes:

She evaded answering me by commencing the prayers. When the same uncle asked me one last time if i was sure I wanted to go back my mom scowled, but I simply reminded him that I was a *pre-teen* and not a child. I therefore knew my mind. I left the aquarium on that false notion (129).

Apparently her journey to Africa was imposed on her. She was totally opposed to the idea of leaving 'her home', America. Thus her character and attitude towards Africa is pre-determined and it relies heavily on her prejudiced memory of what she had thought Africa was. It is not surprising that on her arrival she contemptuously judges the Cameroonian city as dirty, rugged and disorderly.

In her aunt's house she scornfully describes the relatives she meets and their arousing welcome. She wonders if she ever had such kind of relatives in Africa. Also, she demanded for a swimming pool to the amazement of the visitors who were present. As one of the visitors clarifies to her, such social amenities were only possible in five star hotels in her country. All she had yearned for was the American lifestyle in her home country and it was impossible. Freud would regard such attitude of making unrealistic demands as a result of the experiences that 'had involved the emergence of a wishful impulse which was in sharp contrast to the subject's other wishes' (Lectures on Psychoanalysis). Since she was forced to leave America despite wish to stay, she nostalgically recalls the kind of life she could have lived if she was there. That is why she publicly expressed her ridiculous and prejudiced comments about Africa.

Elizabeth's picture of boarding school was quite different from what she found in Cameroon. She had thought of living in a clean room, free from daily routine jobs and socializing with



children from rich families. However, she was shocked to share a room with more than two students. The floor to the dormitory was rough and unpaved. She wondered if that was a boarding a boarding school meant for students from rich families.

To release tension that had build up since she left America, Elizabeth broke into tears signaling her disapproval of the manner in which she had been treated. Frustrated with life, she joined a group of students who abused drugs and feeling alienated and hated by her parents she opted for the company of her boyfriend to the surprise of her aunt and mother.

Indeed, Elizabeth had a fixed opinion about Africa. She was still firm in her decision to stay and learn in America. The American community had fully influenced her way of thinking and any attempt to sway her from them only proved disastrous. It is her to change and internalize a new order of life instead of sending her daughter to Africa, it's her to leave.

Elizabeth' mother projects her bitterness and sadness to be as a result of her daughter. Morris(1994), looks at projection as an act of shooting or throwing internal depression at someone else .According to Freud, projection refers to transforming negative feelings towards others to an extent that individuals are unable to “recognize the reality of their own behavior or feelings’ and they blame others for their own mistakes” (Snowden 112). Therefore, we can argue that Elizabeth’s mother is unable to control her excessive anxiety that is brought up by alienation or racism.

On the same note, Chimamanda Ngozi’s “My Mother, the Crazy African”, depicts a girl child tormented by her mother’s African culture and she is disoriented to cope up with challenges that are as a result of new environmental conditions, language and culture.

First, we note that Ralindu, a girl child protagonist, hates herself for being an African because of her Nigerian accent that makes her to repeat most of what she says so that the American friends can understand her. They laugh at her because she is unable to pronounce words in the American accent. She struggles to pronounce words as Americans and learning the “right American inflections” (55).She regrets why the British colonized Nigeria and not the Americans. She argues that Nigerians learnt and emulated wrong stressing of word syllables as a result of their influence.

Secondly, Ralindu wishes to be an American, she identifies herself with an American name, Lin. Therefore, she desires to change her identity. Her mother insisted that she should be called by her Nigerian name, Ralindu, which meant life in their Nigerian culture because she was born and survived after some of her brothers and sisters had died. Thus the African name has a special significance to her but she opted to be identified with the American name. Therefore, her mother assumes that she does not live with her especially when her friends try to find out if she was in the house. That is why she is molested by her parents for denouncing her identity. She identifies herself as a Philadelphian and not Nigerian. Her mother argues that Americans identify themselves with their ancestors and therefore, she should learn to accept her origins.

Furthermore, Ralindu is irritated by her mother’s behavior especially her complains of exorbitant food prices that are on the steady increase monthly, her mother’s response to murder cases that are reported in the news that scare her and her hatred of the police .Ralindu consoles her that the American police are understanding since they arrest one after committing a crime like over speeding and sarcastically notes that her mother lives in perpetual fear in the foreign world.

Ralindu also notes that her mother is the only one who is still clinging to the African culture because even her father complains that she is naive and unable to host visitors during get together parties because she insists in speaking her native language. She notes her father’s complaints:

“You have to talk them more,” Father says. Make them feel like they are welcome. Stop speaking to me in Igbo when they are here.” And mother will screech, “So now I cannot speak my language in my own house? Tell me, do they change their behavior when you go to their house” (54).

Therefore, he urges her to avoid code switching that makes her visitors uncomfortable. However, she is adamant and continues to shame him. To add to that, Ralindu scorns the warm relationship her father develops immediately he receives Nigerian immigrants. He treats them well since “in America every Nigerian is your brother” (55). However, she depicts their stay as unpleasant and threatening for they could stay longer than expected trying to “to figure out what to do” (55). That implies that the immigrants had not set objectives to achieve before leaving their countries. However, her father is ready to host them as long as they wanted and does not reprimand them to leave. Therefore, Ralindu does not wish to be identified with the Nigerian immigrants and she addresses them in English since some of them came to look for material benefits and adamantly stay in their house.

On the other hand, Cathy, an American neighbor from Chicago, unlike Ralindu, wishes to listen to the Nigerian immigrants especially “how they suffered at the hands of the soldiers, bosses, husbands, in laws” (55). She sympathizes with them while Ralindu seems to be disgusted with their stay for revealing the dark African side to strangers, secrets that she has tried to conceal. However, her mother insists that she should be proud of her African ancestry.

Also, Ralindu also rejects her parents’ warnings not to visit or share a meal at any American home. Her mother insists: “Don’t eat there either. They might think that we have no food of our own” (56). However, the narrator poses that her demands are impossible to meet in American society set up since the school sometimes organized lunch in certain homes. She also faces the wrath of her mother by calling her using her first name, an abomination in the African culture.

To add to that, Ralindu strives to be an American. Matt, her boyfriend, is not aware of her African culture and the significance of her name or her home country because he views Africa not as a continent but as a country. As a deep relationship develops between them, Ralindu does not warn him of the strict nature of African families and when he storms into their compound, her mother is utterly frustrated. Matt suggests that they should go to her bedroom to listen to music and he is surprised that her mother could not allow that to happen. Thus they pose at the sitting room and he is ordered out of the room by her mother because of their uncouth behavior. Once he leaves, her mother orders her to undress and face the ordeal of hosting a boyfriend in her house at her tender age.

Consequently, the following day Matt describes her mother as a crazy African and eyes a different girl who passes by as they were reflecting on the events of the previous night. Thus according to the narrator, she had lost a companion as a result of her mother’s strict observation of African ways of life and values plunging her to loneliness.

Isabella, in Namwall Serpell’s short story, “Mzungu”, is unable to come into terms with alienation because of the colour of her skin and she resorts into self-exclusion. She spends most of her time alone playing with dolls and reading story books. The narrator notes:

Isa had no siblings and when the other expatriate children were around she was frantic and listless in turns. Today, she began with frantic. Leaving the grownups outside propping their feet on wooden stools and scratching at their sunburns, Isa marched three of the more hapless children inside the house and down the corridor to her bedroom. The book, *D’Aularies’ Book*

*of Greek Myths*, second to the live, broke winged bird she'd found in the driveway (32).

The narrator seems to suggest that Isabella's was desperate and her life was full of pain and internalized fear. She could not intermingle either with other children or adults freely and had to hide herself from social activities. Her life was marked with frustrations and had to console herself in solitude. She is depicted as being bored of her face when she looked at herself in a mirror and compared herself with the floor indicating that she rejected herself and wished to have somebody to show her love. The narrator notes that she full of self pity and sometimes thoroughly examined herself in a bathroom:

She examined her grey eyes, closing each in turn to see how she looked when blinking. She checked her face for hair (an endless, inevitable paranoia) and with a cruel finger pushed the tip of her nose up. She felt it hung too close to her upper lip. Then Isa let her fall into the mirror, her own face rushing toward her, her eyes expanding with fear and perspective. At last minute, she reached out her hands and stopped herself (34).

The self examination exercise is a manifestation of repressed thoughts of how Isabella believed that other people hated her and therefore, she had to closely find out if her own image made people to be scared of her. She had to contend with the realities of who she was as a result of the color of her skin and resentfully, accept to live her life. When she attempted to join other children who were playing, she was snubbed by them and therefore, resorted into loneliness. Alone, trees gave Isabella company and later, when she learned that she was told by an elderly woman that she was white she began to cry: "As though, at the flip of a switch, Isa began to cry. Her breath hitching on every corner of the young-girl chest, she turned and run off the room, tripping down the steps in her haste". Isabella, in shedding tears after learning that the society did not accept her because she was white, points at the ill treatment she had constantly received and internalized. Therefore, she had to flee as the woman attempted to explain to her identity. She, in return anxiously examined dolls hoping that they could give her the meaning of her life, indicating how her loneliness affected her personal life.

In conclusion, both Elizabeth's mother and Ralindu seem to transfer their negative attitudes and their inability to integrate to the American society to other characters. Instead of them learning on how to adapt to the new society in America, they harshly treat those who are close to them. Therefore, their respond with hatred and deep resented anger in all that they do to other characters.

#### 4. RESILIENT TYPES

Liveliness, vigor and repressiveness are some of the major characteristics of resilient types of characters in diasporic African short stories. Characters are depicted as able to positively confront setbacks as they struggle to live far from home. As their expectations turn out to be a mirage, they are portrayed as having a will to flourish and survive in harsh environmental conditions. Even if their hopes are dashed and have to yield to demands of a completely different order of life, they are optimistic that with time life will be bearable. Also, they seem to be aware of the challenges of living far from home and therefore, are ready to find out how to solve the challenges that glare at them. They are portrayed as decisive and sociable as they share their problems with others and make the right choices that shape their destiny and are not pulled down

by forces of segregation. This is the kind of situation that can be traced in Olufemi Terry's short story, "Dark Triad" and Shadrek Chikoti's short story, "Child of a Hyena".

To start with, Ebank is one of the African intelligentsia frustrated in Europe, in Terry's short story, "Dark Triad". He is lonely in London and he joins a group of his friends to take cocaine as a pastime activity and temporarily to shield them from a shivering cold night. Freud seems to argue that people are "obliged to suppress a powerful emotion instead of allowing its discharge in the appropriate signs of emotion, words or actions" (Lectures on Psychoanalysis). Therefore, Ebank in taking cocaine, he is in a position to forget momentarily his problems in Europe.

To add on that, Ebank not only he has selected drug abuse as a way to suppress his feelings but also he has chosen writing as another way of expressing his frustrations. For instance, in a hotel where he is reluctantly waiting for his fellow Africans to arrive for a dinner party, he notes in his journal: "An old-settled city, the facades plain and difficult to read: Europe" (204). This expression seems to indicate that they are unable to cope up with extreme cold weather conditions. It also suggests that the city is covered with fog and snow to the extent that it is dark and making it impossible for him to write letters in his journal.

The narrator informs them that Samia has four lines of cocaine that Tewodros had left for him. In desiring for more cocaine, the narrator reveals his repressed ideas of wishing to be doing some activities to pass time and such type of drugs will automatically introduce him to a different world of hallucinations.

As they sit to have their dinner, an identity crisis emerges. In their discussion, regrettably they note that they either know very little about Africa or they have forgotten about it altogether. Ms KO informs them that she has founded an NGO, 'Know Africa' that is targeting to encourage people to think differently about the African continent. She asserts: "The name invites the world to know the continent and at the same time to refuse to perceive it as an undifferentiated mass of suffering and disease" (208-209). Their conversation discusses the identity crisis and members are unable to identify African sub-tribes in Africa such as Wodaabe and Fulanis. Other characters concentrate on discussing a number of countries they have lived in and why the Dark Triad party should be made real to strengthen their African bondage as they live in Europe. The argument here is that characters are unable to cope up with stressful situation.

Terry depicts characters that are alienated in a foreign land and have to find different ways of expressing their anxieties including abusing drugs, writing books and gathering together to seek each other's support as means to forget the problems they are experiencing in Europe. On the same note, the unnamed narrator in Chikoti's short story, "Child of a Hyena", is shocked to discover that the man he had known to be his father for thirty two years is sterile and has to contend with the introduction of a different man into his life. Instead of accepting the reality, he runs away from his people to live in self seclusion.

He opts to live an ascetic life. According to Winkler (1994) asceticism refers to a total denial of reality that involves a self imposed solitude. They live a lonely life since they do not wish to interact with other people because of certain historical events that tainted their reputation. According to Anna Freud, asceticism is a defense strategy that involves the restriction of the ego where "a person loses interest in some aspect of life and focuses it elsewhere, in order to avoid facing reality" (Boeree 23). The argument in asceticism is that individuals wish to live in an ideal world especially when they attempt to shun the truth while facing embarrassing situations.

At the beginning, the narrator takes his Danish wife to Africa for the first time. They had planned for the journey for a long time and had saved enough money to visit Africa's game parks, lakes and spend time with their family in Malawi village.

As they arrive, Teleza, his former village girl friend informs him that his father had a fight with Saidi, a well known village drunkard and polygamist. He is devastated because news of their fight spread in the entire village. Therefore, he recalls when he was in standard seven when Saidi had stormed their home in the middle of the night demanding from his father a chance to see his son. A war erupted but as he left, he sang and ridiculed marriage infidelity and rich men's behavior of moving in with village wives because of the influence of their wealth. These two incidents forced him to face Saidi to unravel his identity crisis. He wanted to discover the origin of their father's quarrels and fights. Frankly, Saidi wondered why it had taken Bwande, the man who the narrator for a long time had thought to be his father, that he was his biological father. This revelation shocked him:

“So, Bwande has never told you that I am actually your father. That he just raised you?” His words cut like a razor blade. I feel a headache coming on. Saidi's picture vanishes from my head. With my eyes still closed I left my body float. I drift away into nothingness. Sleep comes like a soft wind, blowing me off my conscience, softly (98).

The narrator's body language indicates how he was disturbed by the revelation. Saidi was a village drunkard and hated by many villagers for his unscrupulous behavior. He wondered, therefore, how could such a man be his father, how could he internalize and live with the reality that the man he had known to be his father was actually not the one.

Unable to trust Saidi, he confronted Bwande and inquired from him if he was his biological father. He notes after seeking that clarification: “Father loses balance and almost falls. He appears transfixed on his chair” (99). The physical fall signals what takes place in his mind. He had hidden this secret from him for a long time and thus unable to explain to him how it all happened. He wondered how he will lose his grip, influence for a son he had cared for in his lifetime.

However, he composed himself and revealed to him that indeed he was a child of a hyena. According to the old custom, a newly married wife was expected to expectant immediately after marriage. If she failed, an arrangement between himself and her husband was made and a different man could move in with her. That is how it had all happened. Thus the man he had thought to be his father for thirty two years was sterile. Devastated by this news and unable to accept the reality, they immediately packed their belonging and left to Copenhagen. As they walk in the city far from home, the narrator notes that he could not recognize the streets, the shops, rivers and crowds of people, key characteristics of the city. What he could only see was the faces of Bwande, his mother and Saidi. This refers to his agony and shame he had gone through in Africa. He could not understand how they could consent to such a barbaric arrangement in the disguise of cultural demands.

Thoughts of his childhood could never be erased from his memory especially the extent in which his 'father' was fond of him and brought for him everything that he needed, enough pocket money, pairs of uniform and being the only child in Katonda village putting on shoes. To recall his 'father's' treatment reveals his torments and emotional state of losing his identity. He had to focus a different life in order to forget what he had learnt at home.

The narrator's attempt to denounce his society's culture to live a solitude life in Denmark points to his inability to assimilate painful events that tarnishes his reputation. He avoids interaction

with his family in his rural home hoping to forget the painful memories of accepting a different man as his father. To live an ascetic life in a different country makes him to lose his identity an important aspect in his life. He should have accepted the act of being born out of the hyena culture.

In conclusion, both Chikoti and Terry depict characters that have high expectations once they arrive in Europe. However, after staying there for some time, they are faced with multiple challenges and are unable to meet their targets. Consequently, their lives are characterized with frustrations, anger and repression. They lack a way to express this anger in the white dominated society and sometimes it builds up to unmanageable levels. They look for safer grounds such as writing or drug abuse to release tension that has been building within. According to Freud, displacement is directing of anger onto a substitute target that is not the original cause. This gives rise to “feelings of self hatred, depression and inferiority” (Snowdell 111). She seems to suggest that displacement is the change of pessimistic feelings to a more socially acceptable one. It involves characters depicted expressing their emotions such into a more acceptable form such as writing or discussions.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

To sum up, characters develop various defense methods as they face challenges poised living in the Diaspora. The anxieties that may build up as result of the overwhelming experiences that came up because of racism, alienation, and disappointments of being unable to meet their expectations are manifested in the defense strategies that they unconsciously develop. Either they are characterized by their illusions, resentment or resilience as they struggle to make their ends meet in a foreign land.

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