



## Diaspora digital literature: role reversal and the construction of self in selected Ikheloa's autobiographies

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### Abstract:

The digital space serves, for the diaspora Nigerians, as a creative platform for identity and cultural preservation: a way through which they maintain connection with their homeland. This notion is evidently articulated in their creative writings on the digital space through where they imaginatively explore diverse social realities and personal experiences. This paper sets out to examine diaspora digital literature: role reversal and the construction self in selected Ikheloa's Autobiographies.

It interrogates memories of the home concept and the lamentation of the self as a social construct. The mechanism adopted by Ikheloa in trying to manage the other (new personality) while struggling to reconcile the memory of gender roles in Nigeria. Memory is an anchor and a strategy for survival for most diaspora writers. Memory of home is emphasized in the narrator's autobiographies and a desire of home as representation of freedom and authority. But the price for a better life for his children seems to hold him captive and as such, he practices 'fatherhood'. However, this practice is with an endless wish of returning home as a means of preserving his mind while carrying out his new gender roles in America. Psychoanalytic is adopted as premise for the analyses of the texts.

## 1. Introduction

Diaspora digital literature are a minority ethnic(s) migrant narratives that are published in cyberspace such as: Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media sites where migrants cognitively maintain links with their origin and reconcile home with ongoing diasporic experiences. One of the features of this literature is a chapter(s) or fragmented fictionalized account of actual events or reminisces of past conditions either at home or abroad. Diaspora digital literature is the leitmotif for the construction of identity and culture. The construction of home and the personality of the diaspora writer are fluid and changes according to his perception and dissatisfaction or happiness with his experiences at home or aboard. This literature thrives on digital platforms that experience little or no censorship. Thus, the freedom of the digital space allows for various forms of construction of self and home. The digital space is a 'free' platform for the transplant of organic societies and their experiences through the written word, infographic, sound, kinetic pictures among others. The manifestation of diaspora digital literature can be broadly broken down into the traditional categories of: Drama, Prose and Poetry. These forms created via the use of computer technology appropriate technological innovations such as: the insertion of images, graphics, sound, movement, the use of hyperlinks among others to an extent that the forms challenge the existing models of print literature. Electronic Literature Organization (1999 p. 2) in its classification defines digital literature as, "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand alone or networked computer". Nigerian diaspora writers use social media platforms to reconcile and construe their experiences away from home. Benkler (2006, p. 3) affirms the foregoing in his *Wealth of Networks*:



...we are seeing the emergence of a new folk culture—a practice that has been largely suppressed in the industrial era of cultural production—where many more of us participate actively in making cultural moves and finding meaning in the world around us.

Diaspora Nigerians are constrained by environmental influences in their quest for cultural reconstruction and self redefinition. However, memory is crucial in the construction of self; it is a determinant in upholding societal construction of gender and self in any society. The memory of home is source internalised 'realities' for Nigerian migrants in America and they carry it as an anchor to wherever they travel to. They weigh their new experiences and realities with the paradigms of home and sometimes they become disillusioned with the external realities when such do not favour them or when they are different from the internal realities at home. El Saadawi (2007, P. 1740) observes that, "...this creativity... it is inspired and structured by our own lives and not by copying theories of struggle from books". Apparently, Nigerian Diaspora Digital literature seems to be structured on the experiences away from home and the memory of home. Diaspora digital autobiographies do not follow the formalised chronicled representation of the development of lives of the Nigerians in America rather it is the representation of certain dissatisfaction or lamentation with the conditions at home or abroad. However, at close study overtime one can identify the beginning of the discourse of the narratives and the tone of acceptance of joy and lamentation. New media platforms become a relief outlet for those who are oppressed by their situations to use pseudo names in the narratives of their plights in abroad. Thus, digital platforms provide the medium for diasporic Nigerians to contribute towards self rediscovery and cultural revitalisation. Freud's Dynamic Model helps us that writers like Ikheloa are influenced by their unconscious which they execute consciously. Ikheloa presents his hidden desires, fears, ambition, passion and irrational thoughts which are product of his unconscious and he consciously demonstrated it as Freud's model of the dichotomy of the conscious and unconscious suggests.

## 2. Memory of home and dream

For the Nigerian migrants, their digital narratives most times capture the issues of dual personality and indecision on the part of the narrator. This indecision is borne out of the inability to choose stay abroad or to relocate home; this indecision is also influenced by their unconscious of what awaits them at home. The failure of Nigerian migrants to make these choices stimulates the narrator to travel home in the wind of dream and memory so as to maintain his hold on America while still being a Nigerian; through memory and dream the narrator maintains a physical presence in America and a slightly psychological shift in acceptance of his situation. The Nigerian autobiographical writer, for personal gains of the promises of America which are elusive in his homeland, the narrator uses dream and memory to avoid physical dislodgement in America by straddling both physical and psychological space. He weighs these two spaces through previous experiences and the ongoing realities in America. Although the digital diasporic Nigerian writer might lament the failures of government and infrastructures, there are certain realities at home that are not related to the Nigerian government which he romanticizes about and comforts himself. In Ikheloa's *The Second Coming...* he demonstrates that commitment to indecision was largely to the economic and financial security in America. He is afraid of forgoing America for Nigeria which still exists in his memory so he employs the mechanism of memory to remain in America while still participating in Nigeria. The flight to Nigeria through dream and memory emphasizes the importance of America in the survival of the migrant Nigerians in America and memory and dream becomes a survival strategy for the Nigerian migrant in America. Ikheloa reconstructs himself as a magical being having the power to transcend his present physical space in America to a physical space in Nigeria where he is also present. The digital diasporic Nigeria writer is always in a state of flux and in a state of strife trying to *equilibriumise* home with the experiences and expectations abroad. The narrator strongly affirms the foregoing when he celebrates thus:

In my dream I fled America, the land that knows no hunger, sad people that will never know the joy of feeding a pain because they are never hungry. In my dream, I landed in Nigeria on my father's favourite palm tree drinking palm wine and eating the meal-that-satisfies-the-belly that I had stolen from my mother's earthen pots(1).



There is a comparative punctuation in the narrator's voice as he observes that "in my dream I fled America, the land that knows no hunger", invariably implying that Nigeria knows hunger and America do not because they "will never know the joy of feeding a pain because they are never hungry". Most American citizens do not know hunger and to confront the memory of hunger, the narrator considered joy as a product of pain which the Americans will never know because it is not part of the structure of their social political system as it is evocative of the Nigerian. The narrator landed in his father's palm tree and eats his favorite meal in his mother's kitchen demonstrating that one of the personal chokers a traveller receives is that of food. The going of the narrator to eat is a means of contending his chokes and disappointment he received with the foods in America. Ikheloa, through memory and dream, eats from his mother's earthen pot, food that satisfied his belly. Ikheloa becomes omniscience in the construction of his mother through using himself as a base for the evaluation of his children having existed within the two cultures. However, he imposed his awareness as necessary responses of his mother if his children finally returned home to Nigeria. Ikheloa cognitively creates his mother's observation about the reality that waits his children as a result of the socializing influence of the American environment that his children are raised in. Ikheloa's construction of self becomes the reality that exists in his supposed mother's curse. He celebrates his diasporic hallucination as a possible reality that a waits his children.

In my dream, my mother, my mother cursed me with breasts that gave me life and succor. It was a beautiful curse, the rendering of it. It travelled through rivers of tribulation and hit me in my conscience's face (1).

The writer in his conscience sees his supposed mother's expression of reality as a curse. However, he considers his mother's concerns as a genuine one but he could not help the situation because he wants a better life for his children which the Nigerian society has failed to provide. Ikheloa's construction of self is that of a dream which exists in the world of trance and memory and within these worlds, he intercepted possible realities that might affect his world. Ikheloa in the construction of self is a seer hearing from the world of the spirits which is a representation of his mother as she divines the future of his own children if they will ever visit Nigeria. Ikheloa becomes a seer having the resilience of silence as he listened carefully to the words of his mother:

"Your children will be aliens in the land of your birth. They will know prosperity all their lives, and in knowing wealth they will live with the poverty of prosperity all their lives. The joy of satisfying a hunger will elude them with the swiftness with which you have stolen from my pots. Their cooking tripods will always quake on two legs, because, you my son, you have made me a two-legged tripod in my old age."

Ikheloa's new self that are his children will be alien in the land of his birth because his children are socialized differently. Although they are an extension of him but in the future there will be a cultural break as to the representation of him in them. There is an anticipated shift in Ikheloa's being in view of the cyclic nature of African cosmological system of the living-the death-the unborn which intersect repeatedly. For the diaspora Nigerian there are no escapes for their children because of the fundamental choices they have to make such as: either they embrace the wealth of America and forego their identity as Nigerians with the framework of their indigenous cultures or they become flux holding a particular value which is dictated by their physical presence at the location. Prophetic disposition in the framework of dream demonstrates that most Nigerian migrant children in America in the nearest future will be alien in Nigerian and within their primary community and when the time comes their perception of home and the construction of their identity will be strictly different from that of their parents. This shows that Ikheloa's construction of self will take a radical turn if not completely obliterated by the socializing choices of the creation of self in America. In most digital narratives, identity, which is a representation of self become the sacrificial offering rendered to the gods of the promises of America. Ikheloa even with the desire for home that weighs constantly in his mind he sacrifices his muscular perception of his being and thrust on his children to further construct his self to suit their beings and realities. However, Ikheloa loves home and travels to it through dreams and memory but he does not resist change as he easily embraces it.

In my dream, I laughed hard and loud at the effete curses coming from

my mother, this shriveled old lady perched at the foot of my father's favorite palm tree. I shivered with sheer joy and satisfaction as my father's palm wine and my mother's cooking raced through me, thrilling my hunger cells with the sheer pleasure of good wine and real cooking. Soon the voice called, called me, looking for her husband. I listened to the ululation of she -who-must-find-her-husband, and the tremors of the voice felled me from my father's palm tree and I woke up in the bosom of a new day, staring at dew -drop dawn in America (2).

This is the desire of most diasporic Nigerians who live in America but live at home through memory and dream holding firm to it while not rejecting the prosperity and protection America represents for them and their children. The diaspora writer in America faces different challenges but he cannot abandon America for home because home lacks the ability to sustain their dreams and their children. Consequently, the re-definition of self and his children's cultural values becomes the price a diaspora Nigerian pays for the prosperity of America.

### 3. Memory of home and gender roles

Identity which is self in Nigeria is constructed through the framework of gender and culture. Gender in Nigeria is functional within the estimate of culture and there are clear roles between male and female in society. Sociologically, the societal prescription has been inscribed in the memory of participants in the society and migrants of Nigerian descent and others who are not migrant has such memories as part of their cultural definition. Thus, memory becomes the internalised premise of the elevation of their "recent" situation in diaspora. Role reversal, which is clearly seen within the premise of America, made the man to adjust physically to a new definition of gender (self) and fatherhood while psychologically, through elevation and the aid of memory, he questions the gender role he performs in America. There is a constant struggle for the definition of self by Nigerian migrants in America when it comes to the role of gender function within the marital union. There is strife to reconcile home with the present realities in America. Patriarchy in Nigeria thrives on economic, physical and political power, it is a social construction that the man is stronger than the woman and as such is expected to be the breadwinner because he has the physical strength to work and this indirectly gives him the political power to function in his capacity as a man. However, matriarchy in America thrives on economic, political and legal power which gives the woman the sort of advantage patriarchy gives to man in Nigeria. Subtly, the man accepts his "new" gender role in America because his wife is the breadwinner and as such he has to function in her position which is ascribed to her in Nigeria. The man becomes the woman in his function while still maintaining the biological label of a man but his actions do not correspond to that of a man in Nigeria within the functional label of a man. Ikheloa's depiction in *Life in America: Ring Around the roses* of the role of his wife on a Sunday which is the representation of her actions within days of the week demonstrated that he is actually the woman of the house in function while the wife is the man of the house. There is a shift physical and psychological to Ikheloa's construction of self in America which he might not be willing to accept or take if he is within the cultural space in Nigeria. Ikheloa's new construction of self in America and his practice of it are depicted below:

It is Sunday morning in America. My wife is going to work all day and all night, she is the major breadwinner of the family. I am determined to see her before she leaves, maybe share a cup of coffee with her, and if am lucky a conversation that is not interrupted by the wants of our children. I make it downstairs just as she is flying out of the door cursing the gods of our fore fathers for not waking her up in time for work. She is late, she will call me on her cell phone, no she won't, she doesn't want to wake up the kids. We'll talk tomorrow she says. I stand by the door and wave her goodbye as dawn licks the sleep off my weary face. America is hard (1).

Ikheloa performs completely the role of social expectation of the woman in Nigeria. Ikheloa is dislodged from his gender labels as a man as it is reminiscent of his functional roles in Nigeria. Role reversal in America





for Nigerian migrants is an exchange, an understanding which is premised on economic factor of which the woman provides for the family while the man steps in to perform the motherly roles. The economic and legal power of the woman in America also affects the man's perception of his being and to let go of his cultural description of a he-man and one who should be expected to be served. Ikheloa's tone is that of acceptance of his role in America and he, like many wives, would determine to see their husband leave for work, Ikheloa is determined to see his wife leave for work. He stood at the door waved at her while she left for work, he was undecided whether she will call but he gave up his thought hoping that she would. Ikheloa in this narrative plays the role of a mother in America even with the awareness of the Nigeria cultural perception of his masculinity, a role he would not have being comfortable to play in Nigeria. However, the social construction of gender which is hinged in economic and legal power in America made him to play such roles. Ikheloa through his narrative also captures the lives of most Nigerian men who left the shore of Nigeria for the milk and honey of America. In his trying to accept his situation that America is hard for the "Nigeria man" he makes a commentary about most Nigerian men situations in America.

My children are still sleeping, exhausted from harassing me all day yesterday.  
.... It is too early call my friend. He never sleeps but his family does and I don't want to incur their wrath. But it sure would be nice to just talk with him about my latest ideas for saving the world (1).

In America, the man is the earth that nurtures and trains the children. The woman's function is to get pregnant and hand in the child to the man because she has to fend for the family and this is the fate of Ikheloa and most Nigerian men in America. Ikheloa's time is always spent in taking care of his children like most women do in Nigeria and his friend also performs the same function of nurturing his children. Most men in performing their gender role in America also engaged in gossip like most women do as the situation of Ikheloa and his friend highlights. Ikheloa and his friend keep awake like most mothers in Nigeria to look after their children. He performs the complete function like his mother performed when they were growing up. Ikheloa in America understands the function of the play of his daughter with his boys as enabling him to concentrate in preparing food for the children and not just a play as he would have taken it if he was in Nigeria and performing his gender role as expected of a Nigerian man living at home. Ikheloa says with gratitude:

My gratitude to my daughter for distracting the boys while I make breakfast is muted by my rueful self- admission that I have failed to teach them Africa nursery rhymes. I must find a book of African nursery rhymes. We have two daughters. They are of school age and they enjoy taking the bus to school. They don't know it, but I enjoy walking them to the bus stop and watching them board the bus to school (2).

In America Nigerian diaspora men take the responsibility of the failure in raising their children unlike what is obtainable in Nigeria where the bad behaviour of the child is attributed to the failure of the mother's training. Ikheloa is socialized to the extent that he now enjoys his "new" gender role in America. His actions are motivated by the poverty at home, failure of infrastructure, lack of opportunities for him and his children, and in the performance of his gender roles, he understands that what he faces is not one percent worse than what awaits him and his children in Nigeria. The privileges and good life for his children in America motivated him to reconstruct himself in America to enable his children obtain these privileges and when he remembers home, it enable him to still be loyal and function in his capacity as a man in America. He reminisced:

For a kid born and raised in Nigeria, the coming of the school bus, as I call it, is a miracle. Every school day morning, at exactly 8:25 a.m. the bus ambles to at stop at our neighbourhood. The kids have already formed a long line, at the head of which is the bus patrol, a little kid who acts like the school bus prefect, ensuring discipline among his or her peers. The kid wears a brightly colored sash, plumage of the peacock, and it is unmistakable who is in charge. The bus lights are on, cars are stopped on either side, until the bus moves, and there must be no movement on either lane. The penalties for infraction are too painful to contemplate. This ritual is repeated all over our local government by more than one thousand school buses (2).

Ikheloa having existed in the world is in constant comparison of his life in Nigeria and the lives of his children in America and he is satisfied that he made the right choice for the sake of his children. He uses miracle to explain the impossibility of the privileges his children enjoy in America even to the thinnest one as that of a school bus converting students to school in America can never happen in Nigeria. Transporting students to schools in America is a right and not a privilege although Ikheloa sees it as a privilege which his children enjoy as a man coming from a society where institutions have failed to live up to their responsibilities.

As parents, we take this ritual for granted. We don't stop to thank the bus operator for being on time every day. However, let the bus be late five minutes, and parents become placard carrying pro-democracy activists. They call the local Board of Education Office and threaten fire and brimstone on the elected board members for allowing such an injustice against little children. Apologetic staffers scurry around offering apologies, crafting carefully worded memos that essentially promise an improvement in services. The under-performing bus operator is hauled to class to participate in the continuous improvement program of the day. It is simply amazing (2).

In America, the government is responsible and sees the provision of transport systems and facilities as the citizens' rights which are not obtainable in Nigeria. The narrator through the capturing of how the American society operates makes a valid commentary on the Nigerian government and its institutions. Through memory, Ikheloa highlights the differences between Nigerians and their government in terms of their responses to the failure of governance in Nigeria and what is practised in America. Ikheloa is full of praise as he remembers what he passed through in Nigeria which made him flee the hardship and starvation that stared at him in Nigeria. He is very grateful that being a 'mother' in America is a favour and a survival strategy unlike the stifling effect of being a father in Nigeria. Ikheloa observes with admiration:

My children have no idea HOW lucky they. They are cursed or blessed by a life of perpetual prosperity. They don't understand real want, they'll never understand the pain of not having and the joy of really getting what they really want. The other day, my little girl came running into the house from school, really upset. 'Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!' she shrieked, 'The bus ride was bumpy!' Man, I really would loved a bumpy bus ride to my primary school, FIVE miles from what passed my home (3).

In most Nigerian digital diaspora writings, the acceptance of role reversal is done for the benefit of the children and the anticipation of a better life for the children. Through memory, Ikheloa could remember how privileged his children are. The vehicle he could not enter while growing up to go to school is what his daughter complained of having a bumpy ride to school. He wished his daughter could see what he passed through. Ikheloa sees his daughter as ungrateful because she lives her life as defined by the American society without having the kind of memory which her father has and which made him to be appreciative of a government that is living up to the expectation of the society. He compared government spending in America spending on education and that of Nigeria and he submitted that 'Nigeria is beyond a sad joke.' Ikheloa's memories of home are that of heavy burdens of failure in all aspects of the Nigerian system that he acknowledged. 'My daughters have access to things I would never have dreamed of as a boy growing up in Nigeria.' Ikheloa is tormented by the memories of his childhood which the Nigeria society has aided its creation, and he is appreciative of the American society for giving his children such comfort that Nigeria had denied him. Although Ikheloa acknowledges that America has its own problems, he is convinced that his children '...would be worse off in today's Nigeria.' Ikheloa's mind is a scale that weighs his ongoing experiences with that of home. He remembers what it means to be a Nigerian and living in Nigeria and emphatically says:

My children will never know the thrill going to BATA to try out new shoes. They seem to get new shoes every month! They will never know the thrill of sitting down at Christmas in anticipation of a once a year bounty of lots of rice and meat. They will never know the pleasures of travelling through books to far places like New York, London, and Paris. They have been to those places (4).



Through reflection on his childhood experiences he emphasized that his children will never experience such because of the things he holds so dear due to lack and because they come once in a while. His children's experiences it almost every day that he could not help to wonder where they derived their joy from in view of the prosperity they exist in and lack of want in his children lives. Although he appreciates America but he is troubled by the new construction of self that is motivated by gender roles. This is seen in his short narrative of *Life in America: How to be a Man*, he observes:

Today did not go well. I woke up in America where civil servants do not have house help, gatemen, cooks, big fat SUVs to bring big fat sautéed escargot (em snail!) to you in bed, etc! I don't like it! I miss Nigeria! Where is my cook? I want my coffee! The other day I had to take my sons myself (!) to their football practice! No driver! Lawd have mercy, I can't live like this! I want to go back to Nigeria! I don't like being a man in America! Waah! Wail! Sniff!! I would like to be a man in Nigeria. Yeah, I just got back from Nigeria where real men are treated like real men!(1)

The memory of home makes him to question the realities he faces with America in respect to the construction of his being. He acknowledges that he is treated differently unlike what is obtainable in America the privileges he enjoyed in Nigeria is none existent in America. He laments the new perception of his "he" in America and he protests literarily of the responsibilities of men in America and he rejected his gender as ascribed in America to the extent that he does not like being a man in America. Ikheloa strongly desire home because it represents freedom and his true being which he is used to.

Allah, I swear, I am moving back to Nigeria because they know how to treat men with respect over here unlike in America where men are glorified house boys. I really loved and enjoyed being a man in Nigeria. People brought the food to me, gave me water to wash my hands and then someone came to take away the plates after I was done and then someone thanked me for eating the food! Wow! (1)

His frustration in America is motivated by his understanding of the functional roles and privileges of man in America and the cultural baggage he carries on how Nigeria works and the roles that are assigned to men which is non-existent in the America society.

In America, things are back asswards, the children eat first and because things are expensive I have to wait for them to finish eating after which I polish off their leftovers. So it will not go to waste. For this, my children call me Father Dustbin! So after being treated like a king in Nigeria, I must say that readjusting to life in America has been a big problem. My family has a different view of the crisis; they think I brought a big bad attitude from Nigeria and they don't like it (1).

Ikheloa is aware that in Nigeria most men eat first but the reverse is the case for him in America. He remembers that his father ate first before them when they were kids. He had to eat the leftover of his children because things are expensive in America for migrants. He reminisces of his privileged position in Nigeria and that what he is reduced to as a "Father Dustbin" in America. Ikheloa sees the redefinition of his gender role necessary for his survival and a determinant to fit in the America society. Ikheloa's feels bad that his children do not understand "they think I brought a big bad attitude from Nigeria and they don't like it(1). Ikheloa's children associates Nigeria with something bad as children of migrants and they do not understand what Nigeria completely means to their parent but for them Nigeria is a single story of all that is bad. Ikheloa, who has complete experience about his home land and even when they complained, knows that men are treated with respect as men against his experiences in America. Diaspora Nigerian migrant has a different perception of their children and in the nearest future there will be different presentation of home by the children of migrants and how they will present it, only time will tell. Ikheloa comforts himself about his place and the construction of his being in Nigeria against his subtle subjection in America.

When I was in Nigeria, I loved the way the women treated the men over there. With major #RESPECT. The men hang around places drinking Guinness Stout and chomping nkwoobi and complaining about Nigeria (“Goodluck na badluck!, no road, no water, problem has changed name again, whine, whine, whine!”) The women would bring the food to us. If they were too big to serve us (eg Madam Minister), they hired servants who chased us all over the house offering to do anything for and to us. (2)

Ikheloa preserves the distant image of home because it gives him protection and has defined him as a man against the requirement the American society had imposed on him before he could live and survive in their society. It can be stated that Ikheloa suffered from self injury and Belinda Hilton observes ...individuals who self-injure need to develop their own systems of self-care as they work towards finding more positive and sustainable coping mechanisms’ (50). Consequently, Ikheloa’s narrative is a mechanism to survive the redefinition of his gender through the physical roles he perform in his home in America against what he is used to in Nigeria and which comes to his mind once in a while triggers. The Nigerian Diasporic writers in most cases seem to write as a means of cultural acceptance of subjugation in America. In trying to understand his new self which societal functions, Ikheloa uses writing as a means whereby he tries to recognize his new self in America. Belinda (2015, P.52) affirms the foregoing thus, writing may provide an immediate outlet to express the “negative emotions, such as tension, anxiety, and self reproach”. The foregoing is reflected in the environmental reality that imposes the reconstruction of self as a result of the economic power possessed by his wife acts as a domesticating influence on Ikheloa and this motivate him to write about his experiences and even mock himself in the line of the narrative as he tries to reconcile the memory that torments him and his present reality in America as a result of the requirement for being a man. Hilton(2015, P.58) observes that:

The process of fictionalising experiences with self-injury may allow for potential connections to be highlighted between trigger and act. The trigger does not activate the act of self-injury but instead puts into action the problematized self-story that gives a perceived reason for the act. Utilising the “show do not tell” approach of autobiographical fiction may enact a greater awareness of the problematized self-story that needs to be addressed.

Ikheloa’s situation in America raises some questions: is Ikheloa’s ‘new’ self in respect to his gender function in America motivated by love or economic reason for a better future for his children? Is Ikheloa threatened by the realities at home that he felt that his humility to accept his new self constructed by the American society is actually a lesser evil? Are gender roles in Nigeria a sociological label or biological as Ikheloa’s ability to switch from one gender role has demonstrated? The reason for raising questions is not to profess answers but to get us rethinking gender and its labels in Nigeria. Ikheloa is socialized in America to the extent that when he got to Nigeria he presented his new self to the surprise of those present. Ikheloa’s glorification of home is not just a survival strategy but it is the acknowledgement of his importance and visibility as a man in Nigeria. Ikheloa has stayed too long in America that he suddenly becomes a woman in Nigeria because he acted against the social depictions of a man in his society. Ikheloa, even when he anticipates home came back home and unconsciously demonstrates that which repulses but which he still do due to lack of choice.

My first night in Nigeria, when I saw the food was ready, I rushed to the kitchen with a bowl and spoon ready to get my own by myself. The women didn’t like that. They ordered me back to the parlor to wait to be treated right, like a man. All the men in the parlor gave me a big speech about how I should be a man and stay away from the kitchen and not do womanly things! I apologized and I was referred to my chair where I proceeded to join the men and complain about Nigeria while waiting to be served like the man I had become. After the meal, before I could get up to take the plates to the sink to wash them I was tackled by several house help (“Tank sah! Tank sah! You want tooth pick? You want Gulder?”). They would not allow me do the dishes (2).

Location in diaspora narrative becomes a requirement for diaspora Nigeria migrant in identity shift and the construction of new self. Ikheloa’s action in going to the kitchen to get his own food breaks the code of



gender place in Nigeria which is quite different in Nigeria. So Nigerian diaspora personality is a personality of multiple flux that requires the dictates of an environment to fit into the societal requirements of his changing being.

At this point I was beginning to really, really, really like Nigeria. I mean, this is how to live if you are a real man! Why, someone even polished my shoes! Hell if I dare ask Ominira to go get my shoes she would go “where did u put them daddy?” I really really, really love Nigeria. The first time I saw a Nigerian friend of mine eat his food, leave the plate where he sat and walk away with his toothpick in his mouth, I panicked. I thought the wife would be upset, run after him and give him an upper cut for leaving his manners on the table (2).

Diaspora Nigerians carry with them the cultural perceptions they have lived in. The perceptions mutate into new realities in different environments. At each point, Ikheloa's memory becomes the yardstick for the evaluation of what is right and wrong although he concedes when he becomes aware of the reality of the culture and social requirements.

I ran after him and I said “O! boy I am sure you forgot and I don't blame you for forgetting because the ofensala was good but you need to do the dishes or madam will be angry!” He didn't understand wetin be “do the dishes” and I explained it to him, you know, washing your plate, blah, blah, blah (2).

Although Ikheloa understands the gender role of men in Nigeria, he unconsciously expresses that of America which are product of his own actions in America.

He thought it was funny, he started laughing and he stopped laughing after he realized he would have a heart attack from laughing and there was a shortage of helicopters to rush him to a hospital in Saudi Arabia! He said America has made me crazy! When the wife found out he had left the table, she grabbed a bottle of Gulder and chased after him and said, “My lord you forgot this. Drink it before it gets warm!” He belched in gratitude. I love Nigeria! When I went home, Africa gave me my blokos back and said, “nna men, you are a man! Act like a man!” That was fun! When I landed back in America, Customs took my blokos away called it contraband, shook my hand and said, “Welcome to America, man!” (2)

The narratives of the Nigerian digital writer are the acknowledgement of changes influenced by environment. Most narratives of the diaspora digital literature writings are the explication of these changes. The greeting that says “Welcome to America, Man!” Is a reminder that certain favours of his home country do not work in America. The use of man is a reminder of the role of men in America. The role of Ikheloa's friend's as a “wife” is what he plays at home and that is why he was alarmed when his friend did not pick up the plate he used when he finished eating.

## 4. Conclusions

The view of role reversal is viewed from the premise of the shifting identities of gender in America. While the physical signifier still remains the functions keep changing based on negotiations of economic power. Although identity and the construction of self in literature are not static, however digital diaspora literature has the fastest capacity to demonstrate these changes. There are consistent changes on the part of Nigerian migrants either physical in terms of his appearance and functions in America or psychological in terms of his memory trying to push back on a America from stifling him. The diasporic digital literature writer uses comparative juxtaposition in the interrogation of his society. While one is past and residual at his home country, the other is ongoing and he faces it as his present challenges in America.



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