



Migrants Metaphors, Nimbly-footed Adventurers and the Imaginaries of ‘Home’ in Eric Ngalle’s *I, Eric Ngalle*

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Abstract. Contemporary migrant narratives primarily centralise the wave of movements of largely young people from the lowly-endowed third world nations, northward, defying known and unknown perils and uncertainties that attend to such journeys into the ever-attractive Euro-America economic zones. This phenomenon proffers fertile site for creativity and critical scholarly engagements. This work examines the socio-cultural contexts of the imaginaries of ‘home’ and trauma of homelessness in Eric Ngalle’s novel - *I, Eric Ngalle*. The work interrogates the novel’s figuration of the historical facades of ‘home’ as signification of cultural roots and tension of memories characteristically depicted in the bulk of narratives of African migrants and the diaspora encounters. The historical import of the nimbly-footed migrants with the concomitant sense of loss and nostalgia that intertwine with the experiences of desperate African migrants in their quests for greener pastures in Europe and other parts of the world, inspires this work. This paper further elucidates the strategies which migrants cope with and the disillusionment they face, including the harsh realities of the experience associated with the situation. The paper concludes by extrapolating the global inequalities, the dire situations in weak third world states, and racial shock that characterise African migrants in the Diasporas that seek economic refuge and better world in Europe.

Keywords: Migration phenomenon; parable of ‘home’; ultimate dangers; survival strategies, Eric Ngalle.

1. Introduction

Contemporary trope of migrant tales of journeys Euro-America bound adventures emanating from African literary ferments, is often characterised and foregrounded in the intriguing encounters of the

narrator-protagonist with the often-breathtaking brushes associated with such narrated journeys. African migrant narratives also spin the tales most often with epic sweep and self-documenting rendition that is woven around the life-drama that unravel around the narrative persona who traditionally pose as both adventurer and informant while leaning on the autobiographical voice as medium of ‘truth’ telling, self-rememorialisation and as an art of pedagogy particularly to the youths. In its critical theoretical purview, autobiographical voice embodies ingredients of ‘truth’ and immediacy which involves self-identity production and self-portrait of the subject matter. Leigh Gilmore avers aptly that in the genre of autobiography that discourses of truth and identity meet to produce the subject of the person’s life (182). In most cases, anxiety, suspense and breathtaking brushes of the narrative hero with ultimate fate, characterise the eye-witness rendition of the protagonist and other major characters that play roles in typically African migrant stories.

Against the backdrop of contemporary African socio-cultural context of migrant stories of adventures, the authors find veritable platforms for didactic overtures as well as for exposing the nasty experiences uninformed migrants go through, and in the end, it tends to bequeath moral lessons for prospective victims who always look up to Europe as ultimate option in the flight from home for a better world. The stories in the migrant trope also serve to remind younger African generation of the historical realities which many cross-border or intercontinental journeys that root from the African forefathers in the past with the glowing memories or repercussions that have been severally recorded by historians (Bazimaziki 63). Traditional adventurous stories often hinge on the great exploits, conquests in heroic quests, and the like; contemporary tales of adventures of youthful Africans to the western world which often begin with the

turbulence and tumultuous realities of the native homeland, and then dwell on the dire experiences in the numerous encounters migrants face while fleeing their homes through the transit and in the host or new destination countries.

As a global phenomenon, migrant encounters as well as migration occurrences in the contemporary context have roused the attention of writers, critics and scholars in diverse disciplines and from equally different perspectives; yet, all seem to be in agreements that the subject matter has a history that is not necessarily new but is as long as that of man's existence, although it has evolved significantly across generations. Karen O'Reilly recounts that:

Migration is simply another social phenomenon, with related social processes, actions, patterns, arrangements, and outcomes, the examination of which illuminate our understanding of human life. International migration (on which I focus here, although the theories discussed are often also employed in relation to domestic migrations) is a particular challenge to theorists because it has 'nation' at its heart. Despite the drive to explain migration that is given impetus by nation states' demands for monitoring, control and limitation, social scientists study international migration because it has the potential to change individuals and societies in diverse and interesting ways, the potential to exploit, to enrich, to bring about competition, and to engender change. It raises questions about identity, belonging, location, resources, social cohesion and social divisiveness (1).

The implication of the above extract confirms that migration issues are diverse, complex and even sometimes complicated.

In contemporary African migrant-oriented literary texts, journeys or quests which are charted or uncharted reminds us of many situations that trigger memories and sensations of African encounters with the outsiders through most of its chequered journeys. For instance, the gruesome episodes overhanging the 'narrow passage' - the transatlantic slave journeys with the concomitant plantation experience in the New World that lasted for centuries, and the tragedies that attended the later abolition movements and periods of civil rights movements engendered bulky volumes of journey-bound narratives across generic forms. The bulk of the journey tales in contemporary context of African migrants' experience, rather than titillate the traveler-victim, they tend to remind the sensitive 'audience' of the broken tapestries in the intercontinental journeys of African ancestors in the

past with the evil that went with such memories through history. The frustrations, humiliations and dangers often associated with such journeys persistently trigger the traumatic situations of what seems to be voluntary journeys into second slavery, and depict the endless travails that African migrants have had since the narrow passage of adventure to the present encounters. Erhabor Idemudia and Klause Boehnke, while collaborating others, shed some light on the socio-cultural and psychological encounters of African migrants in their struggles to realise the undignifying life which they face in the strange places they find themselves after their flights from the multifaceted troubles back in home countries:

No matter the nature of migration, whether voluntary/involuntary or authorized / unauthorised, there is always a realignment of daily lives with attendant significant challenges to economic, social and psychological health of individuals and communities (Quesada et al., 2014). Although, migration is a consequence of many root causes ranging from forced displacements to seeking for better economic and educational opportunities, it is also a social determinant of both physical and mental health in its own right (Castaneda et al., 2015). This is so because the relocation process is an accumulation of risks starting from countries of origin to transit and destination countries. Despite successfully "escaping" from strains and difficulties in the country of origin, migrants must face further challenges until they reach their destination countries. Upon arrival, there are still various challenges to encounter, bothering on adaptive coping mechanisms for proper integration, and problems inherent in the reciprocal exchanges between migrants and citizens of receiving countries (Dovidio & Esses, 200) (51).

This trope of narratives constitutes some form of artistic mediation which, as David Udoinwang and Kufre Akpan puts it, "... centers on the prevalent social order, and charts the course for salvaging the disoriented mass from the present socio-cultural pervasion" (185) where most of African states seem to still be grappling with multifaceted developmental crisis and abject existence for the governed.

The quest stories with the encounters sufficed in self-representing tales and story making by key protagonists in the struggles (David Udoinwang and James Tsaaio (2023). In this later strand, the protagonist-narrators often dwell on the thematic area of self-retrieval, human equality and on the need for self-government, national sovereignty and socio-economic development. Unfortunately, the past anomaly seems to be eternally re-echoing in the

successive generations. Eric Ngalle's migrant account thematically reverberates the complex journeys that able-bodied Africans have had to undertake and are still going through even in the present.

Idemudia and Bohnke affirm that "The history of African migration is tied to the period of the transatlantic slave trade which is often referred to as the "great migration". As they put it, sadly, "Report shows that 50% of missing/dead migrants recorded on the Mediterranean Sea are of African origin. Irregular migrants are mostly men in their late 20s with little education. Globalisation plays a pivotal role in modern migration trends by being a major driving force..." (15). It is against this backdrop that modern intercontinental movements among young, energetic but unengaged Africans embark on using dangerous routes without any specific thing to do there that made them to end up in a foreign land in a near-slave situation; and sometimes this involves smacks of a second wave of 'voluntary' slavery outside the African continent. This is compelled by the spates of national disasters, socio-economic and political situation ravaging most of African countries. The disasters that come are in the likes of war, political conflicts, internecine pogroms, endemic poverty, and atrocious leadership that remain the bane of problems in African societies.

The bulk of the circumstantial journeys and movements depicted in migrant narratives, often get punctuated at difficult crossroads and scenes of breathtaking moves of the nimbly-footed troubadours or protagonist narrators. The rendition in such tales often crisscross the natal homes and shifting to the diasporas reverberate memories of what Emmanuel Obiechina refers to as "...coming up from history's monumental wreckages" (21), where overpowered Africans were carted away from their villages through tick forests to the seas, and thereafter across great oceans of the world to the 'unknown'. In creative writings, in epical tales and in autobiographical accounts, writers often portray the adventures where the captives find themselves assailed by the tragic misfortunes of the loss of home and existence of indignity in unknown world. To point out just a few, the 'interesting trope of Olauda Equaino's narrative, Frederick Douglas's 'Life and Times' accounts, Alex Haley's *Roots* (1977), Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2017), Ben Okri's the *Famished Road* (1991), and Eric Ngalle's *I, Eric Ngalle* (2021), these texts at some juncture unravel the different layers of memories and trauma that Africans have had to make through history and hostilities which have left lasting imprints on the annals of human progress. Therefore, exists very slim line of demarcation between myth and history in

African cultural cosmology and the tales that come in the format narrated in Ngalle's novel that interface with the attempt at fictionalising cultural self-retrieval in an estranged universe, and the realities of postcolonial encounters. Somewhere else David Udoinwang articulated that:

The notion of cultural self-retrieval and belonging as construct of postcolonial politics is pervasive in the literary texts that emerge out of the rupture of colonial history. Such texts, in their different genres are essentially involved with the project of re-memorialising and deepening interests in cultural and historical self-memory and racial pride in a world of besetting prejudices (10).

The chequered journeys and the momentum created through self-telling, eye-witness voice in Eric Ngalle's novel, not only portrays the travesties of African migrant experience in the contemporary sense, they also follow the folklore, mythic and legendary tales of valor, strength and perils that define human existence in a universe where survival and tragedies run side by side.

In the postmodernist socio-cultural situations, movements across spaces are daily getting more and more porous, made easier and encouraged by technological innovations in digitisation and globalisation. It is of general knowledge that although migration from one part of the world to another have been gingered by different circumstances, but much of movements by African migrants in recent times tend to be problematic, because such trips are embarked out of desperation, and thus are humiliating in the sense that the migrants flowing northwards, tiding onshore towards the Euro-America and Sino-Asiatic directions, could be described as more or less victims of local situations that result in decisions of escape from the multifaceted troubles back in the homelands of the migrants. The movements are understandably not necessarily voluntary as it were, but they are largely informed by the compulsion of economic opportunities and drive for better quality of life in Euro-America that is found lacking in the homeland of the migrants. It could be said that while outsiders come to Africa for investment opportunities and adventures like tourism, the bulk of youthful, uneducated and poorly educated African migrants venturing northward do so as a means of escape from the 'fire' of political struggles, hopeless leadership systems, war and hunger ravaging the homeland. Writers have found in the situations of the escapist journeys a fertile ground for imaginative activities and for the recreation of cultural-self- consciousness in the patriotic bids to

expose the difficult existence of the mass of the populace in the third world African nations.

It is against the foregone that we understand how Ngalle's novel uses the adventure-worn hero of the story to traverse the meeting point between the metaphysical and the physical world of the adventurous protagonist in the quest for 'home' lost and the difficulties of coming to grip with the 'better home' earlier imagined. In Europe, the hero is confronted with what is observed best as paradoxes, neither here nor there, suspended in a world that is a direct opposite of what was ever dreamt of, stocked in Russia, yet psychologically astral-travelling regularly back home by the magnetic pull of his cultural ancestral homeland where human dignity was a given, especially each time the journey gets to the crossroads or to dangerous twist of fate or turning points.

Although the mobility of humans from within and outside immediate communities, even at intercontinental level for resettlement, or for one reason or the other, is a global heritage of all mankind, but in recent history African continent has, due to harsh socio-economic and political instabilities, re-enforced with the fast-evolving globalisation socio-cultural compulsions, witnessed a gigantic upsurge in migration traffics and sundry issues. Referring to developments in migration situation in Africa, John Akokpari states it aptly that:

There is evidence of phenomenal increase in the wave of migration on the continent. The conventional causes of migration, including conflicts, political oppression, economic crisis and environmental factors, have in recent years been reinforced by globalisation which unleashes fresh pressure that either facilitate or compound the already huge and seemingly unmanageable migration problematique on the continent (72).

The heart-wrenching experiences of third world migrants, who take to daring and perilous adventures in the flight from broken economies from the tension of cross-sword by power hungry tyrants and hardship in the home countries, often place such persons with or without valid transit documents nor means of survival, in very dire straight and perilous situations. With the new-fangled upsurge in human trafficking and the rising tide of the politically and economically displaced due to conflicts, it remains intriguing to note the magnitude of resilience, daringness and temperament, and of the tenacity with which youngsters dare the unknown destinations. It is obvious to state that such migrants do face the situation of metaphoric choice between the devil and the deep blue seas and get enamored to face ahead into

the fantasy of economic Eldorado that tends to beckon them into dangerous adventures without counting the cost of such daring determinations.

The different motivations for transnational, transcultural migration include business travels, tourism, people fleeing from conflict-ravaged zones for safety, voluntary mobility in search of the proverbial greener pastures, among others. However, these reasons appear natural, but the crisis arises when individuals have had to move from their natural homes to another far-reaching countries to settle and work for survival but this is done without any valid travelling documents, and it gets worst when the host countries, most often are found to be hostile to them due to some kind of phobia and feeling of threat or sheer racial prejudices. Of course, such narratives are not just about migrants navigating the dangerous tributaries towards Eurozone, but even in South Africa, cases of xenophobia of Africans against fellow Africans equally reign supreme. There are vexing issues that have continued to stimulate much of the contemporary literary activities and critical engagements in the global ferment. It is intriguing to note how despite the travails, perils, dangers and even fatalities that attend the experience of African migrants, the traffic remains congested, unperturbed yet, it is observed that the weary-won migrants, moved by the fantasies and dreams of a 'promise land' that Euro-zone represents.

It could be stated obviously that global arena is awash with socio-political, cultural and ideological fragmentations. Modern society tends to promote difference more than promot human connectivity in diversity. But of all the developing or less-developed entities of the world, African continent remains at the languishing stage of human trafficking graph and migrants-related crisis at all levels, where the hapless migrants strive by any possible means to construct new identities, acclimatise in new urbanised cultural spaces and exist under the cover of new personalities in the bid to cope with constraining situations. Hassan Mbiydzennyuy asserts as follows:

Mobility to urban centres provides a platform for Africans to construct priorities among affiliations, attach themselves to collective enterprises and connect to distant others who share their aspirations or fears. The vastness of African encounters and confrontations with distant cultures through national and foreign travel results in what Rosenau, calls "fragnegration" (2004): a simultaneity of integrating and fragmenting polarities defining (and sometimes confining) how identities are formed and performed (2).

The assertion above underscore partly the fragility that define the journeys of nimbly-footed African migrants and the sensitivity against which Ngalle's suspense-burdened narration analysed in this work entails.

It is a significant point to note in the novel how the protagonist, having gone far from his natal home and is now caught in-between the new environment and memories of the home that is now far from reach in Africa, serves as the totem for cultural self-preservation. Home in the midst of homelessness in the host country remains a spell of some sort, signifying the persona's attempt at dealing with or surmounting the 'cultural difference', the strangeness, and the disillusionment that results in moral disorientation, anxiety and desperation. Also noted is the persona's wilderness of existence, leading a life, as with other African migrants lost in the streets of Europe, of vagrancy in a frighteningly unfriendly, cold and uncertain universe, are most often left with no choice than to deploy even if illegal, immoral strategies for survival and adaptation. The author's role in the circumstance of the story is that of unravelling the veil and paradoxes of 'the good life' perception of Africans who daily dream of and queue at European embassies with all manners of largely cooked up documents, falling victim to the ploy of traffickers or 'agents' to gain entry visa or venture on dangerous land or seas routes going to Europe to live and work. It is, no doubt, the dire condition of the homeland that sets the able bodies young Africans on such dangerous adventures. Udoinwang and Akpan state aptly that "The efforts at navigating African postcolonial societies out of the miasma of primordial ethno-conscious doldrums, socio-political corruption, moral atrophy, religious and gender violence and related environmentally induced calamities" (341) have put the young, but energetic and jobless natives on the flights of fancy and desperation for survival across the continental shelves.

The African migrants portrayed in Ngalle's story that the reader finds marauding, wallowing and wasting away most often indulging in suicidal adventures found their way at where they are due to the ever-dimming hope in the source countries as part of response to survival instinct. Formation of relationships through creation of solidarities and co-habiting, memories of situations back in the homeland and smartness of the adventurers serve to keep hope of survival or coping alive. Tamuka Chekero points out that "The formation of relationships is analogous to the ideas of nimble-footedness, conviviality and social networks, with conviviality, for example, encouraging migrants to reach out in order to meet new people and learn new ways of surviving" (362). A close

examination of the text and context done below sheds more light on the metaphoric perceptions and social realities of the encounters of African migrants in their host European countries.

2. Migrant Journeys, Homeless Wanderers and the 'Totem of Homeland'

Right from the opening part of the novel, the novelist starts by foregrounding the inclement socio-political order at the natal home that creates the instinct for escape. With the painted intolerable situation that leaves no hope for the younger generation sets in desperate and circumstantial quests for the land of promise across the far oceans and deserts. To the African, home is mingled in the blood and flows through the veins of kinship community and ancestral origins. Home symbolises the sole, body and essence of survival and being. To leave home is to go seeking livelihood and return; to leave home therefore entails a temporary physical departure of which the real essence of home moves with the traveller and eternally haunts or keeps companion him until the return. On the other hand, to be forced out of home under any guise is considered calamitous and degrading, but that phenomenon clings like a spell to the person or personality eternally, no matter the distances the journey stretches. In other words, the journey as depicted or imagined in Ngalle's 'self' account does not just originate from the urge to relocate, but it is more of flights from unpleasant situations. David Udoinwang and Chinenye Amonyeze writes of the state of Africa that in most of the societies of post-independence/postcolonial African states, there are sundry manifestations of uncertainties. As they put it "... It is this manifest state of lack that puts the Black continent in perpetual despondency, nagging negativities and state of self-pity" (160). At the very beginning of the narrative, the protagonist of *I, Eric Ngalle* tries to introduce the reader to the circumstances of his life using autobiographical mode, and by this strategy, the reader is inducted into the foliage of the universe that brings the narrative persona under serious pressure to flee the homeland, where he now finds himself embarked on a quest for a better universe to live and pursue a meaningful life:

I grew up in the village of Wovilla near Small Soppo in the shadow of Mount Cameroon. I had Africa in my blood but on passing my A-levels, all I wanted was to get the hell out of Cameroon- it was the only avenue open to me if I wanted to build myself a better life... I turned to the internet and contacted a Canadian immigration lawyer who said he had links to several universities and could advise on sponsorship and how I could study abroad (7).

Aided by forces of globalisation information society, he turns to the internet and in a jiffy, the world of opportunities opens up to receive him. What home could not provide, vision of Eldorado outside the homeland had a ready-made answer and the dreamer being of the savvy digital modernity, grabs it with both hands. David Udoinwang and Ikpe Akpan rightly assert that “The scope of digital transformation has also broadened. Households and organizations tend to welcome digitization with both hands” (1), and even the remote places of the earth has come under the dictates of ubiquitous digitisation.

Having made the contacts, the exit visa secured although after much humiliating encounters, but before one could guess far, the traveler finds himself in the middle of nowhere. At a stopover in Malta, instead of Belgium destination, he finds himself en-route Russia, a destination least expected, but the thought of home, ancestors and mother soon becomes the spell-binding totems that would haunt and pull the adventurer through his tangled journeys, and keep watch over the renegade, as it were. He has been duped, defrauded by barons of human traffickers who parasite on young and hapless Africans that are desperate to locate to Europe for survival. Suddenly he has become a prodigal left with only memories of the homeland. Whatever the unfeeling human traffickers have brought him to, he does not mind, he arrives in Russia by hook or crook, psychologically battered, hungry, without a specific destination to think of, and disillusioned, yet not deterred, though drained of meager resources by fraudsters and fellow uprooted Africans. *He is faced with danger all through. As the protagonist victim puts it:*

When your money was finished, you would be left to your own devices, abandoned. If the Russian skinheads did not finish you off, then the severe Russian weather would... I just stood in the midst of it all and tried to take in my predicament. “Where do I begin? Where do I go? Where are the gods of my ancestors? Why has such a curse been placed upon my young shoulders”? (10).

So far, the Europe he had dreamt of as heaven, ironically seems most unfriendly and unwelcoming. Those he had run into have been mostly dupes and crooks who cashed in on his inexperience to undo him rather than help bail him out of the scary situation of Moscow. At such crossroads, homeland now beckons on him strongly, spiritually and nostalgically. This persistent grip of his ancestral homeland serves to stabilise him in moments of overwhelming confusion and psychological conflict. Among those he runs into are fellow Cameroonians and other African migrants whose lives in Russia are nothing enviable to reckon

with. His journeys or wandering around Russia in search of opportunities reveals a weird undercurrent as he recollects his brother’s history lesson about the harshness and extreme coldness of Russian world which he told him back in the village about the experience and disasters faced by German soldiers in Russia during the World Wars’ military campaign there. As he enters train from Moscow heading on a four-day trip to Stavropol, he recollects stories of the harshness of Russia and repeatedly asks himself what he is really doing in Russia. He regularly in moments of introspection and stupors of reminiscences, wonder in utter disillusionment.

He traverses Russia from city to city with nothing fantastic to recon with. This portrays the largely aborted dreams and unpleasant existence of African migrants. He also encounters dangerous street characters like scams, fake friends and all sorts in the likes of Diamond, Rico, and Helga, and other racist peoples who are dangerous to familiarize with. His mind keeps wandering back to his village and ancestral family in Cameroon, his natal roots recall the communalistic closeness under which he was brought up, as he is presently faced with the persistent hunger and loneliness that characterises existence and the society of Russia.

While in Russia, he very often reminisces with trepidation about the tragedies of leadership that exist in Africa with have made life unbearable for young energetic Africans which push them into exile. He casts his mind back with fun memories about the roles of great personalities like Mobutu Sese Seko, former president of Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo, Ahmadu Adhijo, the former president of Cameroon, Kwame Nkrumah, former president of Ghana and former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. He did not also forget to think about some important Black great men like Steve Biko, who founded the famous Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, Miriam Makeba, who was nicknamed Mama Africa. She was a South African celebrated singer, songwriter, actress, and civil rights activist who was an advocate against apartheid South African white-minority. He also felt very sad about the works of notable black leaders like Thomas Sankara, Jerry Rawlings, Lucky Dube and a host of other pan-Africanists whose efforts were aimed at creating a truly African renaissance but have been watered down by the activities of white supremacy and dominant activities of the whites, what Elizabeth Eukora refers to as the machinations of the “cannibalistic comprador bourgeoisie and their cohorts” (102).

Eric Ngalle considers the indignities and the undignifying life that Africans have been subjected to in the Western world as “forms of socio-political hindrances that inhibit Africa’s sustainable development “and their unending problems of identity and culture (Elizabeth Eukora, 2023:101). The mention of the Rwanda genocide caps it all about how postcolonial and post-independent African states have remained assailed by multifaceted crisis. Faced by many dangers in a strange world of Russia, he often retorts to an outburst: “I wanted to go back to Cameroon; Russia was stranger to me” (30). He journeys around Russia angry having a feeling of revenge against those that have made the homeland uninhabitable, hopeless and have striped or deprived his honor and respect.

It is sad that the narrator sometimes roams about to places where blacks are not tolerated at all. At such times shouts of contempt with the derogatory expression “Black monkey!” (35) is heard which cast a spell of fear on the stranger. In the bid to survive the strange and alienating universe of Russia, he has to become a serial liar, “...living on the kindness of strangers...” (45) black-mailers, fake dollar manufacturers, dealers and tricksters. The picture he paints of life of Africans in Russia is rather very derogatory. The following line points to this fact: “Eventually... I did not have any money, yet strangers who had their own families to take care of were feeding me” (47). When he got sick, he resorts to the use of traditional treatment method, while his friends utilises incantation method and invocation by summoning their ancestors back in Wovilla to come to their rescue. At some other times, he recourses to sodomisation with the family head while he himself becomes a serial sex abuser and addict in that same family that sought to accommodate him for a time. He tells his fellow migrant friends of this escapade: “Again, I told the story how I had engaged in a three-way sex act with a man and his wife” (61). All these are done to depict the fragile, delicate and depraved life of African migrants in Europe.

Indeed, all through the story what seems to be the totem ‘Africa’ harangues the protagonist like a spell that cannot be exorcised. The scene below depicts this unique feature that plays through the entire movement of the story:

My mother and I have this strong bond, you see, as I stayed in her stomach for almost twelve months- she kept reminding me of this... She even told me that I already had a tooth when I was born... She might be telling the truth, who knows.... I was truly a cursed child. (53)

In most of the breathtaking scenes of his survivalist criminal escapades, his mind wanders back and forth of his village community in Africa. He figures out mentally the scenarios of home, perhaps as an antidote for the indignities that he daily comes face to face with dangers. As he tries to enact a scene of a deal which he intended to dupe people; when he senses that he might be killed this time around, if he is found out, he puts up some kind of bold appearance not to betray the trust placed on him. This extreme situation mentally transports him back to his homeland, invoking the spirit of his ancestors for a supernatural backing. The extract below points to this assertion:

I was getting really scared... I was here in the middle of nowhere, with people who looked like killers. They had strong astute faces, which when they spoke, remained straight- there were no betrayal of emotions... I was far away, far away from the meandering slopes of Small Soppo and no longer surrounded by the plantains behind my mother’s house.... My village only existed in dreams, I was playing the role of an innocent translator trying to scam five thousand dollars from people who could kill us and abandon our corpse in the middle of a forest, and no one would be the wiser (77).

The consciousness of home is ever beckoning and this has taken toll on him, created by a deep sense of nostalgia and dejection in the world which he finds himself.

The next phase of his escapade was to migrate back to his native Cameroon in Africa. However, the back home seems difficult and staying back in Russia is nothing to cherish at all. He has expected to sail through without much ado at the Cameroon embassy to obtain return visa, but the huddles of getting the exit passport is tougher. Now as would be expected, depression begins to set in. He reflects on an earlier date in his life when he had been rejected by his kinsmen, his country that stampeded him on a desperate flight to where he now finds himself. He had taken flight enrooted to Belgium but had found himself in Russia and done all to survive in that strange country. In the situation he found himself, he could not even locate the way back home. He laments:

Not only was I rejected by my paternal kinsmen, but the gods had also conspired to ensure I was rejected by my own country. I felt suicidal. I had to activate my backup plan.... Vincent also told me about a voluntary repatriation programme of the United Nations... and was convinced I would be a perfect candidate... There was no way I could have stayed or survived another winter in Russia (114-115).

In the periscopic line up of events in the narrative of the person's life adventure in Russia, he had been rejected at home by his kinsmen and family and edged out of his immediate world, seeking help from the embassy of his own country, he ended up being frustrated by his government in foreign land, rejected at the country's embassy and even the individuals at the United Nations repatriation programme office where he had sort for intervention for him to return to Cameroun but to no avail.

By the time the temperament of the story begins to drop, the migrant had beaten the tough security at Heathrow security check to the shock of the immigration officer and this aptly points at the extent to which desperate African immigrants fleeing from home in the quest for survival and meaningful life could go. It also underscores the point that the anticipated host country is never the anticipated Eldorado. As a denouement to the gripping suspense that characterise the narrative, the captioned blurb at the conclusion page gives the story a safe-landing, a lasting impression and a great lesson for desperate young Africans who without valid exit visa nor specific skill or qualification to reflect on the narrated experiences. Part of the caption reads:

If you get this far reading this book, you have been reading of very dark times in my life, two years and two months spent in Russia.... The story had to be told, especially with the situation in Cameroon right now. People are still falling victim of human trafficking on a grand scale. This book is a warning. Many Cameroonians died in Russia. Who knows how many are dying in Libya, chasing that dream of going to the 'White man's land, the land of milk and honey' (247).

The author's autobiographical mode of storytelling makes the narration more immediate, dramatic and closer to humanity. What such vividly presented life-drama portrays can be dispersed in its essential meaning because the story reflects the reality of hundreds of thousands of Africans fleeing their homeland, expecting to arrive at Eldorado in Europe but end up in streets as mendicants, vagrants and lost in the world that they least expected.

3. Conclusion

The story in *I, Eric Ngalle* weaves a parable of postmodern, global fantasies and travails that go with such escapes. It is a long spin that captures the picture of what has become modern day problem of human trafficking, massive migration of unwary yet daring young and vibrant men and women who, in their quests to locate enabling, humane and conducive environment often fall victims in the captivity of

human traffickers, who deceive the hapless youths, sease them of their hard-earned money with juicy promises of finding them job in Europe without the capacity to do so. Often such merchants fall victims into the world of unknown fate and uncertainties. The story seems to lay the essential outline of what illegal, undocumented immigrants go through in their different host European states they arrive at, and at the same time sounds a strident warning to the prospective victims of such situations. It should also be seen as a clarion call to African leaders and stake holders to make Africa appeal to the youths as 'home' indeed and give society the direction and hope through good governance, patriotic and responsible leadership in the interest of the present generation and the future of African countries for sustaining development and growth.

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