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The African Migrant, European Dreams and Destination Realities

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Abstract

The perception of Europe as an economic fortress by many Africans have led to a tremendous spike in irregular migrant activities. While many die during the migration process, there are some who still make it to their different destinations in Europe. What this research has done is to explore the representations of the experiences of irregular migration in two documentaries: *Letters from Libya* (2015) and *Surprising Europe* (2011). The researchers argued that a significant policy push in the adoption of a none-romanticised approach to the representation of irregular migration by the cultural industries in Africa will contribute immensely to the fight against irregular migration in Africa.

Key words: African Migrants, European Dreams, Destination Realities, irregular migration

Introduction

The Europe poised African migrant is a person of gargantuan dreams. The European dream for most African migrants is that of solace, of comfort, of wealth and other myriad of expectations. However, the continued tightening in the migration process especially from Africa to Europe makes it very difficult for many of these dreamers to materialize their European dreams. Unfortunately, the desperate ones undertake these journeys through irregular means. While some are unable to make it to Europe, those who eventually make it to Europe are left with sour tastes as their condition of stay is mostly undocumented. It is the representations of the experiences of these migrant groups in documentary films that this research explores.

Afro-Europe Migration has become a teething problem to many countries in West Africa. This is because of the many irregularities that sometimes accompany many of the migrants who embark on the journey to Europe through irregular migrant routes. The implication is far reaching both on the migrants, the originating and destination countries. Nigeria particularly has become very prominent as an originating country in the Africa-Europe migration discusses. Though Migration is natural to man and has been an age long practice, the practice however is mostly unwelcome in situations in which the migration process is considered irregular. The irregularity of the migration process arises from the inability of the migrant to meet up with the migration requirements in his country of destination which in effect renders the migrant a persona non grata in the destination country. This

according to Haas is “international movement or residency in conflict with migration laws”. (2008, p. 13)

West Africa has a high rate of emigration activities, and the implication is far reaching. The effect ranges from an obvious drain of the continent’s intellectual economy as a result of a seeming lop-sided migration flow to the unfortunate demise of many of the continent’s youth population to irregular migrant endeavors. The deaths on trans-Sahara routes and the many unfortunate stories of migrant boat mishaps on the Atlantic (Malakooti, 2015) epitomize these loses. Inclusive in these gories are the recent events in Libya in which many of the Europe bound migrants from West Africa are either sold into slavery or have their organs harvested and sold in the human organ black markets (Malakooti, 2020: David, Bryant and Larsen, 2019). These notwithstanding, Europe poised irregular migration has remained very active within the West African sub-region. The International Organization for Migration reports that between 2019 and 2020, about 941 persons were reported either dead or missing in the irregular migration process in West and Central Africa (IOM, 2020). The data simply shows that even though Europe poised irregular migration activities has witnessed a significant reduction (Haas, 2008), there is a possible resurge in the Europe poised irregular migration activities in West and Central Africa within the last decade.

Inclement economic conditions, wars, socio-political restiveness and unfavourable living situations have been the major drivers of economic migration in West Africa (Idemudia and

Boehnke, 2020: Flahaux and Haas, 2016). Beyond the harsh economic encumbrances that act as the major push factor, the internalization of Europe as an economic haven is another factor that has continued to enable irregular migrant activities in Africa. According to Martin Asiegbu (2010);

> Migrants, completely ignorant of the socioeconomic conditions prevalent in Europe, entertain the idea of Europe as an easy-to-live environment, a 'paradise on earth.' While they are not wrong that Europe is far better than their home countries, they merely have their heads in the clouds about Europe of their expectations – a nonexistent Europe. Their idea of Europe derives from the impact of the consumer society. (p.6)

The implication is that there is a fundamental problem with the inherent way in which many Africans perceive Europe. They tend to visualize Europe as a safe haven with very flippant economic opportunities that enhance easy wealth. Representation shapes perception. This warped perception and internalization of Europe as an economic paradise is mostly as a result of the single storied representation of Europe by migrant returnees, fictional narrative films in Nollywood and other cultural industries in Africa. While one may not dispute the fair economic conditions inherent in Europe, there is a problem however with the seeming single imagination of Europe as an economic paradise devoid of socio-economic and other existential challenges. We have in a previous research (Ebekue and

Ezeajugh, 2020) argued that the continued romanticisaton of migration and the experiences of migration in Nollywood feature films is counterproductive to the struggle against irregular migration in Nigeria. The reason is that it breeds an image of European paradise which may eventually materialize in a desperate attempt to emigrate. The point is that there is a problem with the representation in which the European dream becomes overly romanticized that it breeds desperation in the minds of the potential migrants. It is this desperation that most times results in the irregular migrant endeavors in North Africa as a gateway to Europe. Unfortunately, many of the youth population who eventually migrate abandon the possible opportunities they may have had in their countries of origin in search of the European dream. The eventual emigration to Europe would present untold challenges especially among the migrants in an undocumented situation many of whom may not have the requisite skills to fend a living for themselves. It is the situation of this group of migrants that this study explores using Al-Jazeera's documentary film *Surprising Europe* as a springboard. The irregular emigration process also portends great danger, untold suffering, disappointment and dehumanizing experiences to the irregular migrant which most times is at variance with the European dream prior to embarking on the journey. This process of irregular migrant journeying and its representation in the *Letters from Libya* (2018) also forms a major discuss point for the research. This research therefore is geared to argue that a non-romanticized and a true to life approach to the representation of Europe poised migration (irregular migration) as seen in *Letters from*

Libya and *Surprising Dream* may contribute immensely to the struggle against irregular migration in Africa.

Film and Migration

Film is a powerful story telling medium. As a medium of communication, film is very influential and has been used numerously in the communication of values, cultures and ideas. Its influence in opinion formation is limitless. Its ability to contribute to opinion formation and affect social behaviors have been studied and affirmed in Kubrak, 2020: Gray, 1950: Omoera,Edemode and Aihevaba, 2017: Onyenankeya and Osunkule, 2017. According to Robin Patric Clair et al (2009), "Film creates an image of society and organizations, presents issues, affects policymaking, and promotes certain practices". Scholars like Jonas do Nascimento (2019), Fateme Mohamadi (2016), Istiak Mahmood (2013), Anita L. Cloete (2017) have all researched variedly on the sociology of film, its influence on society and its usage in meaning making. Findings from these researches suggest a correlation between film and its society.

Importantly, the use of film in mirroring migration dynamics has been a germane subject of study. Irregular migration and its filmic representations particularly have had lots of scholarly impressions and continue to be a subject of scholarship in Africa and the world over**.** Fabrice Schurmans' (2015) research on the representations of irregular migrants in contemporary cinema interrogates the imagenization of irregular migrants as border liners. Rutten and Verstappen (2015) research on audience reactions to screening

migration provides a scholarly background for the inquisitions of this research. Scholars like Wright (2010), Carling (2019), Zelechowski (2017), Peycheva (2016) have variously interrogated the representations of forced migration and refugee situations in films. Beyond the spheres of refugee and force migrant situations, many scholarly contributions have been made in the area of cinema and migrant representations generally and these have all contributed immense theoretical background for this research. Although scholars like Arowosola(2020), Ebekue and Ezeajugh (2020), Melton (2013) and Arenas (2012) have variously interrogated the portrayal of African diasporas in film, none has directly interrogated the representations of the living conditions of West African migrants living in undocumented situations in Europe. This is the gap that the research set out to fill.

Letters from Libya (2018): a Synopsis

Letters from Libya is an expository documentary that tells the horrors of Nigerian migrants who get stuck in Libya in their quest to migrate to Europe through the land borders. The documentary is focused on representing the ordeals of the transit process through which many irregular Nigerian migrants embark on the journey to Europe. The documentary built on the factual narratives of two migrant returnees who survived the Libyan carnage addresses the menace of illegal migration to Europe by land and gives an insight into the atrocities, horrors and sufferings that beleaguer the deadly experience of the Sahara-Libya-Italian migrant route. In addition to this, the documentary also exposes the extent of deterioration of the Libyan society that is evidenced in the tacit legitimization of slavery

and human trading, zero respect for the sanctity of human life very much reflected in the wanton killing of migrants who go to Libya as a transit point to Europe and the unofficial participation of the law enforcement agents in the commission of crimes that endanger humanity. The film whose title was gotten from a song by Dunno (also by the same title) used for the soundtrack is an advocacy against irregular migration. The documentary can be described as pedagogic, didactic and most importantly, expository.

Representations of Migration and Irregular Migrant Experiences in *Letters from Libya* (2018)

Libya has been known for long as a migrant hub and a transit point from where Africans, mostly from the sub-Saharan hub illegally embark on their migrant journey to Europe. The place of Libya in sub-Saharan migration narrative is quite prominent in irregular migration discuss circles around the globe. The quest to migrate away from home to Europe by many West African dwellers has largely contributed to the migrant crisis currently raging in Libya. This is because of Libya's vantage positioning between the Mediterranean Sea and Italy. As such, the route has become a departure harbor for illegal African migrants who seek greener pasture in Europe. Ugwumba Egwuta reports that:

> The geographical location of Libya renders it a transit route for migrants journeying to Italy and many other parts of Europe. The migration crisis in Libya and its attendant consequences was made more possible by the

> instability in Libya, occasioned by the October 2011 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)-led war against Muammar Gaddafi's regime.

Thus the narrative in *Letters from Libya* is representative of the experience of the dominant migrant views of European migration through the Sahara-Libya-Italian route. The representation is rife with pictures of death, sorrow, frustration, despair, sadness and heartbreaks that are encountered on the road to having the European dream through illegal means. For the two migrants whose experiences structured the narrative in *Letters from Libya* (2018), migration through irregular means is not worth a trial. For the second respondent, "illegal migration is not a story of life and death, it is a story of death". The director's treatment of the narrative in Letters from Libya instills in the audience a sense of fear, horror and trepidation. Thus, his choice of words, pictorial imageries and style of interviews were all geared towards baring in its entirety the ugliness and horrors of migration through the Trans-Sahara route.

Right from the beginning of the narrative, the audience is psychologically prodded into the story and surreptitiously predisposed to receive the story from the hypodermic perspective of unpleasantness and ugliness. The psychological maneuver applied in the montage where the two respondents are fused in a tight oval image with the concave visual effect further tacitly creates the impression of repression, loss of freedom and difficulty. The documentarian follows these images up with an audio frame that describes the respondents as 'victims who had dreams of getting to Europe through the land medium" to

further create an intro that preisposes the audience to make a choice against irregular migration even before he is exposed to the world of the narrative. Representations mostly are communicative weapons that directly influence the audience's meaning making system. In line with Ervin Goffman, the documentary achieves a tag by using the words 'victims' which gives the audience an air of superiority over the respondents whose unfortunate stories they are being exposed to. In effect, the 'victim' tag used on the respondents reinforces the audience's belief in the superiority of their choice as non-participants in irregular quests like migration to Europe by road. The representation of the two respondents as victims is deliberate and was used to achieve a negation of the subject from the start. The tag 'victim' is used to achieve a distinction that places the respondents in a pitiable pedestal, a position that ab initio predisposes the audience towards a self preclusion from similar ordeals. The implication is that one does not fall prey to the push and pull factors that may have been responsible for the respondents' choices which resulted in their unfortunate experiences en route Italy through the Sahara . More so, the documentary film through this angle of representation further tends to strengthen the resolve in the audience to preclude the appeals of irregular migration as a solution to the socio-economic anomalies of living in an economically repressed country like Nigeria. This narrative perspective is further strengthened by the revelations the respondents made in their interviews as the story progressed. The documentary does not either outrightly or impliedly romanticize the Nigerian experience by making sure the respondents mention the socio-economic decay in the country as their push factor. He however counters the idea

of irregular migration as a way out of the Nigerian melee by highlighting and subsequently laying tremendous emphasis on the horrors of irregular migration. The documentary lays the counter strategy by crudely exposing the audience to harsh realities of the choice of irregular migration via the Sahara. The gory pictures of undecayed bodies of dead migrants in the Sahara, pictures of helpless migrants in sinking tube boats at the center of the Mediterranean and pictures of migrants captured and placed in cages as slaves were used to inundate and forge the audience's memory of irregular migration.

More so, these images are followed up with a strong demonstration of resolve by the respondents never to try such a journey in their lifetime not minding how difficult the Nigerian experience becomes. Thus, this profession of resolve directly solidifies the perspective which is contained in the frames the audience sees as finished work. In effect, these frames were used to suggest to the unsuspecting audience what meanings to attribute to the images shown or created through the narrator or the respondents as well as the choices to make about irregular migration as an escape from the Nigerian reality.

In addition, the director through the narrative of the respondents further lays tremendous emphasis on the theme of death as a constant factor in irregular migration. The director's imaging of the Libyan migrant experience was geared towards making death a central and conspicuous metaphor in order to fully narrate the enormity of the dangers involved. The constant allusion to death in the documentary is a strategy employed to heighten the fear and exacerbate the goriness associated with Africa-Europe migration through irregular

means. This is because death in the Sahara and the Mediterranean has become a dominant constant in irregular migration narratives across the Sahara through North Africa to Europe. The IOM Missing Migrants Project (2018) reports that "MMP recorded 3,139 deaths and disappearances in the Mediterranean last year, more than 90 per cent of which occurred in the Central Mediterranean route between North Africa and Italy". The mortality rate along this migrant route has been known to be high. Death along the Sahara also contributes immensely to this data set. The IOM also reports that the "MMP recorded more than 1,700 migrant deaths, with over 690 reported in the Sahara Desert". These figures therefore vindicate the director's obsession with migrant deaths in the documentary and his rather morbid representation of migrant experiences in the documentary.

The first respondent in his narrative paints a horrifying picture of his encounters with death in the desert. These encounters further espouse IOM's claims on mortality on the Sahara and across the Mediterranean. The uncertainties associated with the desert experiences even makes death a close encounter on a daily basis in the desert. Thus, of the twenty persons that left with him from Niger State Nigeria, five persons lost their lives and were buried in the desert. The first respondent's confession on the Sahara Desert death was further reinforced with graphic display of the international Organization for Migration's (IOM) data sheet on migration which states that "more than 22,500 migrants have died or disappeared globally since 2014". This graphic support was quickly followed by another which states that "more than half of them died while trying to cross the Mediterranean". The reason for the sea death according to the third graphic display is

attributable to the use of non-sea worthy vessels used for smuggling migrants by Libyan traffickers. Below is an excerpt from the first respondent's interview in the documentary:

> **First Respondent:** … if you come across rebels and deny you don't have money they will stab your anus and make sure they see if there is anything you are hiding. The journey is not an easy journey, I will not encourage anybody to embark on that kind of journey. I saw hell, sixteen days I was inside the desert, our water got finished and we were inside the desert for sixteen days. All our food finished and what remained was only Garri but there was no water to drink. Some of us were drinking piss (urine), you can't find water. We trekked to a place called Duruku for three days. After then about 5 of us were confirmed dead and we buried them inside the desert there.

This confession was his encounter with death on their way going to Libya when hope of making it to Europe through Italy was still high. However, having encountered the realities of irregular migration, the documentary paints a picture of the migrant who had left with high hopes of escaping the hard life in Nigeria praying and begging God to give them one more chance of setting their feet on the Nigerian soil. The documentary once more brings death to the fore when the first respondent's prayer was answered and he set out on the journey home to Nigeria. Once more, the picture of death and trepidation is painted thus:

> **First Respondent:** When we were coming back, it was during the sun, there was no colder again. I saw hell, we buried a lot of people. We had a lot of attack, their soldiers raped our girls and used them without condoms. You can't even say anything because if you do, anything they have they will use it on you. It's not a journey for anybody to attempt.

The documentary does not however end the emphasis with the account given by the first respondent. In the encounter with the second respondent whose story has a lot in common with that of the first respondent, death as a constant factor in irregular migration features once more. The emphasis on death is in consonance with the frames of narrative that guides the director's philosophy of representation in the documentary which is geared towards the demonization of irregular migration across the Sahara. This philosophy is further represented in the following excerpt from the second respondent's interview in the documentary:

> **Second Respondent:** We spent three days in the Sahara Desert; we came across many dead bodies in the desert. With sun in the desert those corpses did not even decay because they were dried up like stock fish. I looked around and even our water got exhausted. Many of us that left didn't come back alive and most of us that came back alive, many of them were with bullet injury some in their legs, some in their hands and some in their waists. Some of them they removed their eyes just

> because of money. They do kidnap some people and torture them so that their parents will send money from Nigeria here to free them over there. The ones that couldn't meet up with the money, those ones will die in their hands.

More so beyond making death a frosty constant in the narrative, the documentary also fiddled with the theme of slavery in its representation of migrant experiences in the narrative. Slavery has evolved as a twenty first century reality in the Libyan migrant crisis. Slave trade has resurfaced in Libya with the death of Muamar Gaddafi who acted as the balance that stemmed the tide in the North African political narrative. Lucas Mafu is of the opinion that the lawlessness in Libya is attributable to the overthrow of Muamar Gaddaffi's dictatorship, political and military intervention from the west. The western Regime installed since the overthrow of Gaddaffi has found it difficult to exert political control and to instill sanity in the Libyan socio-political system. This inadvertently has created a gapping lacuna that has led to the infiltration of the system and establishment of camps in Libya by the ISIS terrorist group. Thus the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSML) reports that "the breakdown in the justice system has led to a state of impunity, in which armed groups, criminal gangs, smugglers and traffickers control the flow of migrants through the country" (1). This is however not to say that agents of government are clean of the impunity and inhuman crimes against migrants. This is because one would like to think that if the west installed Libyan government is completely absolved of the situation, there would be a strong demonstration of resolve against dehumanization and

enslavement of transit migrants in Libya. The UNSML reports however states that they have reliable information "that some members of State institutions and some local officials have participated in the smuggling and trafficking process" (1). As a result, the human rights situation in the country has deteriorated completely and migrants from other African countries find themselves manhandled, dehumanized, enslaved, used for forced labor and in many cases used as prototypes in medical experiments. Some of them also have their vital organs harvested and sold to black market human organ dealers. The director in line with his philosophy of representation in the documentary makes a conspicuous reportage of the Libyan human rights situation as a glaring factor in the Libyan irregular migrant experience. The representation even becomes more gory with the testimony from the respondents revealing the complicity of the Libyan government agencies in the enslavement of migrants as reported by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. However the revelations from the interview with the second respondent shows that even in the United Nations controlled camps, the safety of the migrants are not assured as many of its agents are compromised. Thus, some migrants are even extracted from the UN deportation camps and sold to human traffickers. Below is an excerpt from the second respondent's interview in the documentary:

> **Second Respondent:** All of a sudden, the United Nations troupe came and busted our camp where they put us and they said they want to return us back to Nigeria. That was how the whole story became afresh again. So after they have arrested us they took us to UN deportation

> camp. The torture, the starvation and everything, starved us. So it was there we spent another a month and some weeks in the UN custody. When we were in the UN custody, the Arab police really dealt with us because even the food they were giving us sometimes they drugged them. And they will come and take some us to Trankay where they sale them to people that do kidnap people. Those ones will pay. So we that were praying against deportation while going now began to reverse our prayer. Oh God, let deportation come, we want to go back to Nigeria.

The excerpt above summarizes the director's philosophy of representation in the documentary. The philosophy enshrined in the campaign against irregular migration and most especially through the Trans-Sahara route completely guided the director's representations in *Letters from Libya.* Thus, the documentary in its completeness avoided every form of romanticization of the Libyan migrant experience by confronting its audience with the gory facts and pictures of the Trans-Sahara European migration route. Thus, the audience is forced to come to terms with the experiences which have dehumanized many of the Libyan migrant returnees. And like the second respondent, the audience is expected to achieve a psychological loathing of the idea of irregular migrant journeys.

Synopsis of *Surprising Europe*

Surprising Europe is a documentary film produced by Aljazeera and basically themed on the experiences of African migrants in Europe. The documentary is broken in parts and each of the path is given a title to depict the central focus of that particular part. Three parts from the film; *Making ends meet, Under Pressure* and *Hopes and Dreams* have been chosen for close analysis in line with the research concerns. In the first part; *Hopes and Dreams*, the documentary concentrates on the experiences of four African migrants who share their experience of migrating from Africa to Europe. Stephen, a Ghanaian migrant has spent about twenty six years of his life as an African migrant in Netherlands and has become a successful entrepreneur. His story spans from his early days as an unskilled undocumented African in Europe and his struggles towards adding more values to himself so he could finally get his living condition regularized and accepted by the system. Michael on the other hand has spent seventeen years of his life as an African migrant in Spain. He does menial jobs and is frustrated and disappointed that the impressions he had before moving to Europe do not in any way match with his experiences as a migrant. He is yet to find his feet after seventeen years of migration to Spain. The narrative in part 2; *Under Pressure* shows Rose, a young female Nigerian migrant sharing her ordeal and disappointments since moving from Nigeria to Europe where she expected a bliss of life. In the part 3; *Under Pressure*, a Nigerian migrant (Mopi) and his clique of African migrants from various African countries share their experiences as migrants since their movement from their various

countries in Africa where life is seemingly difficult to Europe where they have found out that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Representations of Migrants Living in Undocumented Situations in *Surprising Europe*

Documentaries are visual chronicling of actualities. The medium with the aid of seasoned journalists and visual producers strive relentlessly to sniff out truths most of which are hidden behind the ornamentation of romantic covers. *Surprising Europe* through the relentless efforts of Aljazeera and its team in putting up realistic representations of happenings around the world pries into the life and experiences of African migrants in Europe and in the process obtain personal accounts of these experiences from the migrants themselves. In *Surprising Europe*, African migrants living in different parts of the European continent were investigated. The underlying findings from these investigations evidence the disparaging contrast between the perceptions of Europe based migration by most Africans and the actual experiences of African migrants in Europe.

The documentary series begins its narrative by giving out a data set that throws light on the enormity of Africa-Europe migration trend. This data set according to them helps in fostering better understanding of the number of displaced African migrants and African migrants whose migrant status are irregular and undocumented within the threshold of the European Union. Consequently, these data sets most importantly help in shading light on the true situation of the number of African migrants in Europe who are either underpaid or not working at all as a result of their irregular migrant status and as a result live below the

standard and most times find living in Europe more frustrating than living in their home soil from where they undertook the Europe poised migration. The revelation from the data reeled out by the narrator shows that the number of Africans who live below the radar as undocumented migrants in Europe is twice the number who are documented and as such enjoy the social benefits open to migrants who stay within the broadband of government's awareness. In the words of the narrator:

> Every year, thousands of our brothers and sisters leave the African continent and head towards Europe. Right now, there are about four and a half Million Africans who officially work or study in Europe plus seven to eight million Africans who are here unofficially. That means, without working papers.

The ordeals of living in Europe in an irregular situation make it dehumanizing and depressing as an undocumented migrant. The approach by this documentarian does not romanticize the European experience but rather brings to fore the gories and macabre realities of having to pass through untold hardships in the quest to live and have a grip on the European dream. The representation in this documentary has empirical support that shows in effect that the narrative is mostly fact based, objective and directly representative of the real experiences of most African migrants' resident in Europe. The documentary's imagenization of the ordeals of living in an irregular situation in Europe are best substantiated in Michele LeVoy and Eve Geddie. According to Michele LeVoy and Eve Geddie:

> Once in an unregulated status, migrants are systematically denied those elements that constitute a basic standard of living and face a de facto violation of their fundamental rights. They lack health care, are denied education, are deprived of labour protections, occupy the worst available housing conditions, and largely remain invisible in the eyes of policy makers (88).

Levoy and Geddie's assertions about the kind of living available to migrants in an unregulated status dominates the narrative in the documentary under discuss as many of the migrants studied are either living in that condition or did at one time or the other struggle to regularize their stay in Europe as migrants with irregular status. Rose's expectations of making a better living migrating to Europe were dashed when she realized that the only job available to her as an irregular Nigerian migrant is prostitution. Not left with much choice, she is thrown into a horror filled twist of a fast-changing destiny which leaves a much soar taste in her. From being a university student in Nigeria who worked to finance herself in school, Rose as a matter of necessity switches to trading her body in Italy in a bid to survive the harsh realities she has come to meet in Italy. Ssuna is not different. Sunna prior to migrating to Amsterdam was a journalist in Uganda. However, migrating to Netherlands as an undocumented migrant subjects him to doing petty cleaning jobs which he was able to locate with extreme luck. He is faced with a different reality from the dreams he had before relinquishing his journalistic work in Uganda for the opportunity to migrate to Europe. The underlying metaphor portrayed through the frames of the documentary

narrative of *Surprising Europe* points out the sad contradictions between the perceptions of Europe by Africans living in Africa and the realities of living in Europe most especially as undocumented African migrants. The representation is filled with odd and uncolorful pictures of living in odd situations most of which leaves utterly nothing to write home about. Contrary to the wanton expectations of exotic environments, flashy cars, designer body gears and lavish food menus, the scenic location of most of the migrants are rather appalling, psychologically disturbing and aesthetically discombobulating. Due to the living conditions of the many of the undocumented migrants, the picture frames are replete with images of squalor and the viewer is faced with the oddities of perplexed subjects living in abject ghetto conditions. This is the situation with virtually all the migrants studied by the documentary in their different countries of residence in Europe. The documentary however does not make it seem like a blanket representation of every African migrant living in Europe, but a fair representation of most unskilled migrants living in Europe and most especially as undocumented migrants.

Critically, one may ask do the migrants on their realization of the mirage of the European dream, stay through the horror rather than go back home from where they undertook the journey? Fortunately, the documentary through the instrumentality of its case studies explores plausible explanation to the ever-nagging question. The documentary narrative points out that these migrants rather than go back home to embrace their former lives are held back by shame. In the words of the narrator “shame is what keeps many Africans in Europe. They can’t go back to their families at home without having made a fortune”. Thus,

due to shame, many of these migrants would rather continue struggling, suffering and being dehumanized in Europe than go back to Africa. For someone like Sylvia who had at one time contemplated suicide due to her situation and seeming loss of hope, she couldn't still go back, or risk being deported because of shame. In her interview in the documentary, Sylvia demonstrates the resolve to stay back in Europe to struggle through the storm than going back home to face a life of shame. Below is an excerpt from the interview with Sylvia in the documentary.

> **Sylvia:** People might wonder why people in Europe fear to be deported. The thing is when you go back there (Africa), they laugh at you. I mean, you become a laughingstock. From the day you step your feet on the airport everyone laughs at you, you have come with no bag; you have come with no money whereas people are expecting you to be in a different state.

The documentary under study represents irregular migration as a dare devil affair rife with uncertainties and indecipherable twists. The narrative approach further helps in bringing the viewer very close to firsthand narrative of the harsh experiences of living in Europe especially as an undocumented migrant. The image is painted in a way that it will drive the real story of migration to the world and mostly youths in Africa who still view irregular migration as a plausible alternative. In line with Ervin Goffman's theory of media framing, the documentary's principal frame selection directly balances the narrative by choosing

individuals who mutually compenetrate the experience of the European dream. However, these frames in abiding with the propositions of Goffman's media framing theory counter the migrant myth that romanticizes the migrant experience and migration as a haven and a shortcut to wealth. This frame of representation also shows that there is prospect which obeys the natural laws of productivity and wealth creation. Hence, having highlighted these frames, the documentary lays emphasis on two basic things; hope for legally accepted migrants who imbibe the virtues of hard work, diligence to duty and socio-economic discipline. On the other hand, the documentary lucidly and vividly makes an obvious statement of doom for migrants whose situation of stay within the European territorial space is irregular or undocumented. The implication of the narrative is that with hard work and discipline, documented migrants may eventually have a clement experience of the European dream while undocumented migrants are bound to have horrible experiences of the European dream as underdogs. In doing this, it however represents irregular migrant experience as hellish, gory and an exercise in futility and foolhardiness. The story of Stephen, the middle-aged Ghanaian migrant and Ssuna, the Ugandan migrant typify the second frame which shows the migrants settling in to enjoy the European dream with years of hard work and constant self-development. For Stephen, it took him seventeen years in the Netherlands to find his feet as an undocumented African migrant after years of hard work. This is not without carefully profiling Stephen's effort at getting documented and achieving self-upgrade. The documentarian made sure to stress Stephen's effort at personal development channeled into education as the success formula. Thus, his diplomas in travel

agency management and travel consultancy were well advertised in the documentary. The conspicuous display of the certificate on Stephen's office wall is a deliberate attempt to achieve emphasis by the director. The camera from the medium shot of Stephen creatively zooms in to display the graphic content of each of the certificate frames broadly displayed on the wall. The underlying aim for laying emphasis on Stephen's method is to make sure the viewer does not get the wrong notion about Stephen's success story as his story only constitutes a rare fragment of African migrants' stories in Europe. This is why his years of toiling and working petty cleaning jobs took longer time in the documentation of his success story. Thus, the representation gives the perception that making it to the top in Europe may be harder than making it to the top in Africa. In effect, Stephen's signoff words dramatically demonstrate the underlying objective to this second frame of representation. Prospective young African migrants are thus forewarned in Stephen's words; "to all Africans who want to come to Europe, it is not as easy as you think. It is hard work, education, God fearing and the blessings of God".

More so, the position of the documentarian in this narrative is carefully laid out in the individuals who constitute his focal point. The numerical overwhelming of the migrants with pitiable experience of Africa-Europe migration over the few who have eventually found comfort through years of hard work and discipline helps to drive down the point. Nigeria as a major contributor to the Africa-Europe migration experience has much to learn from the experience of Rose who represents myriads of Nigerian girls in Italy trafficked and used as sex merchants all around the world. The Chatham House report on Nigerian

migrants in Europe shows that Nigeria has become prominent for human trafficking because of the myriads of its girls who populate the streets of Europe trading sex. The report vividly states that "In Italy, in particular, men using sex workers often preferred new arrivals from Nigeria over their Italian counterparts, many of whom had drug addictions, due to the fear of aids" (n.d). Rose as represented in the documentary is just one among these girls who hold the story of horror, of frustration, of dejection and perplexity as their migrant realities. The story of Rose and her experiences as a Nigerian migrant in Italy aptly captures the relationship between the myths of migration in the country mostly among the youths and the subsequent experience of irregular migration to Europe. The myth of migration as promoted within the country largely contradicts the account of the experience of irregular migration put forward by bold migrants like Rose whom through the account of their experiences seek to discourage vulnerable Nigerians who dream of seeking greener pastures abroad. Rose like many young Nigerian girls is tricked into migration to Italy where she was promised jobs and significant change in her fortune. Again, like many young gullible and vulnerable Nigerian youths who seek to better their living conditions and those of their families, Rose fell for the Romantic pictures of Italy painted by her supposed benefactor and migrates to Europe unaware of the horrors that await her. Her narrative is thus summarized in the following excerpt:

> **Rose:** I was expecting to find a job as a cleaner or an office job. That is what I was thinking that I will find in Europe but that is not what I found, I found prostitution in Europe. The person that brought me, she was a

> family friend. she told me she was going to take me to Europe and when I come to Europe there is job everywhere and I was excited. I quit my school, I quit my work. She gave me things to put on. She took me to the street and said I should stand there and I said stand there and do what and she said I should stand. I told them that I can't do it and that I want to go back home but they refused to take me back home. Yes, I have been doing prostitution for six years now.

The documentarian in this documentary through the interface with many other African migrants sought to bring to the fore the realities of irregular migration to Europe most of which is mostly romanticized within the African hemisphere. The documentarian was strong in his representation, categorical in his pictorial narrative and balanced in his presentation of findings. The representation of migration and migrant experiences in the documentary has laid emphasis on the disparaging gulf between perception and reality. The director's treatment of the stories in the documentary narrative if anything was strongly made to depict the real life experiences of African migrants living in undocumented situations in Europe most of which are not palatable as seen in the stories of Rose, Ssuna and Stephen.

Conclusion

The effort in this research exercise was to explore the representation of irregular migrant experiences in the documentary films studied. We have critically analyzed the frames of

perspectives applied in the irregular migrant narratives and we strongly believe that if there is a concerted and unified policy effort at getting the cultural industries in Africa to toe this line of representation in narrating irregular migration, it will add a significant boost to the fight against irregular migration in Africa.

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