

Stories about the tragedy of migration and the yearning for home

Better Never Than Late

CHIKA UNIGWE

'Better Never Than Late' contains ten stories chronicling the unusual lives of a group of Nigerian immigrants who are making their way in Belgium. The collection centres around Prosperous and her husband Agu. They were well-off in Nigeria, but lost everything during riots, and eventually fled. Their new life in Belgium is in stark contrast with the one they had in Nigeria. Agu wants to carry on the old traditions, meet friends and enjoy meals together, but expects his wife to do all the work in the kitchen. Prosperous, who was an independent working woman in Nigeria, is not at all happy about this. Their marriage is thrown into crisis by the disappointments brought on by migration.

The stories also explore the lives, with all their ups and downs, of the various visitors Prosperous and Agu receive. They all left Nigeria in the hope of a better life, but the pain of missing Nigeria is a heavy price to pay. Unigwe's descriptions are all spot on and infused with a generous dose of irony.

'Better Never Than Late' is a poignant collection of short stories about exile and what it means to be a migrant in search of a better future. The collection focuses specifically on the place of women, black and white, in a patriarchal culture. The stories explore violence against women, in both Nigeria and Belgium, and examine the power relations between women themselves. Readers will be surprised and moved by the realistic, recognisable characters and Unigwe's empathetic analysis of a migrant community, the situation they fled and the disappointments in their new country.

With these very filmic stories, Unigwe may have set herself up as the voice of the African émigré's experience in Europe.

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AUTHOR



Chika Unigwe (b. 1974) is a Belgian-Nigerian author who writes in English and Dutch. She is considered as one of the most probing, thought-provoking writers of the recent renaissance in African fiction. Unigwe writes novels, short stories, essays, poetry and educational books on themes that are close to her heart: migration, identity, loneliness, diaspora, love, loss and cultural and racial confusions. Her work is primarily populated by strong female characters. She currently lives in the US. Photo (c) Koen Broos

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