

Notions of return Migration in Chimamanda Adichie's "Americanah" and Imbolo Mbue's "Behold the Dreamers"

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Abstract

This paper highlights the portrayal of return migration in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016). Through the application of the principles of postcolonialism, the study establishes that return migration is the last phase of the migration cycle. Through a textual analysis of the novels, this paper indicates that postcolonial African migrant characters engage in both voluntary and forced return migration to their home land, especially when they cannot continue to live happily in the host land. Some of the returnees are forced to return home due to their inability to integrate into the host society, while others though successful, and opt to return home voluntarily because they feel that there is no place like home. This paper concludes that the unequivocal presentation of return migration in the texts doubles as advice to African immigrants, to return home voluntarily especially when living abroad becomes fraught with difficulties.

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Introduction

Migration and its associated concepts have become some of the most topical subjects in contemporary literary discourse. This is, especially, the case with the discourse of African literature and the literature of postcolonial societies in Asia and Latin America. Migration, is a social and geographic process in which people move from a particular country, like Nigeria to another, or from one region to another, Ikeagwuonu (2020:212) notes that migration describes

the movement of people to a new place or country. The causes of migration, according to the author are varied and diverse. This means that people migrate for different reasons which include: to search for a new geographical location to satisfy their needs; to acquire wealth and fame; to seek a better educational foundation; and, to explore business or job opportunities. The submissions above underscore the push and pull factors that are largely responsible for migration in Africa and other postcolonial societies which are well engaged in literary discourses.

However, there is an aspect of or a stage in, migration which appears not to have received commensurate attention in the discourse of migration in African literature. This stage is the stage of return migration. This essay, therefore, engages the notion of return migrate on in African literature using Chimamada Adichie's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*.

Conceptual Foregrounding

Return migration represents the last phase of migratory flow during which a migrant goes back to his/her home land after living for a significant period in the host land. It constitutes one of the major phases of migration, because the plan of returning to the home country is often a possibility for any transnational migrant. Return migration, therefore, incorporates the short return visits and long-term return of many migrants to their country of origin to resettle permanently or to emigrate again after staying at home for a period of time.

George Gmelch provides a definition that forecloses the possibility of a repeat migration by stating that the concept is the “movement of emigrants back to their home lands to *resettle*” (1980: p. 136; (emphasis added). Gmelch conceives return migration as the final phase of the migration cycle which ends in a resettlement back home after the transnational migrant may have spent many years of sojourn abroad. Gmelch identifies three distinct types of returnees namely: (i) those who intended temporary migration, whose time to return migration is determined by the objectives they set out to achieve prior to migration; (ii) returnees who intended permanent migration but were forced to return by external factors; and (iii) return migrants who intended permanent migration but chose to return due to homesickness, and/or their failure to adjust or integrate into their country of destination (p. 138).

However, Dumont and Spelvogel (2008:163) reveal the lack of accurate and comprehensive statistics as a major setback in understanding the phenomenon of return migration. These two scholars propose four reasons that explain the concept. According to them, “failure to integrate into the host country, individuals' preferences for their home country, achievement of a saving objective, or the opening of employment opportunities in the home country, thanks to experiences acquired abroad, which can instigate a return migration.” This implies that return migration can either be voluntary or forced. Despite the voluntary or involuntary nature of return migration as elicited by the above four reasons propounded by Dumont and Spielvogel, (2008:190) assert that “some of those returning home have been forced out by a removal order for having broken the laws on immigration of residency.”

Nevertheless, Cassarino (2004: 17) presents a different perspective in his theorization of return migration. He argues that successful return migration is a product of the returnee's preparedness and resources mobilization. Cassarino explains that while preparedness refers

“... not only to the willingness of the migrant to return home, but also to his readiness to return”, resources mobilization. “... pertains to tangible (financial capital) and intangible (constants, relationships, skills, acquaintances) resources that have been mobilized during the migration experiences abroad.” Return migration, therefore, “must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home” for it to be successful.

Return migration, “a reversal of migration and of the psychology for leaving the home nation” (Okolocha, 2016: 147) constitutes a major thematic focus in contemporary African literature, especially fiction. According to cousins and Dalson-Katiyo (2016:1). The fact that the thirty-fourth issue of *African Literature Today*, the oldest journal on African literature in the world, is strictly devoted to “Diaspora and Returns in Fiction” is glowing evidence that supports this claim. The authors reveal that contemporary African fiction “...has represented returnees in a range of different positions” including belonging and locating in the ideal home, alienated and dislocated in the home and experiencing multi-placedness (2016:1). For instance, the picture of the returnees popularly known as the ‘been-to’ remains the usual protagonist of the return migration narrative. AyiKwei Armah's *Baako Onikpa of Fragments* aptly represents the returnee or ‘been-to’ typically portrayed as “a man educated abroad (usually in the colonial country or the US) who was returning home”.

Expectedly, this portrayal has changed especially following the emergence of many diaspora African writers most of whom were born, raised and educated in countries of the Western world, or who are children of mixed parentage, or who were born in Africa but migrated at an early age with their parents. Some of these writers have used their works to explore the concept of return migration in its various dimensions. Some of them used their writing to depict their personal experiences of return to their home countries. Thus, the twenty-first century has witnessed the mutation of the ‘been-to’ into different forms, and this mutation explains the complicated diversity of the experiences of transnational migration and return. These varied portrayals of the returnee protagonist are captured in novels such as Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005), Aminatta Forna's *Ancestor Stones* (2006), Saidiya Hartonan's *Lose Your Mother* (2007), Benjamin Kwakye's *The Other Crucifix* (2010), Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does not Die* (2012), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), among others.

This paper interrogates the diverse portrayals of return migration in twenty-first century African fiction with particular reference to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. In these novels, the authors, both migrant writers, approach the concept of return migration from different perspectives. They also present varying pictures of the returnees.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism

The emergence of modern African literature, especially as it is currently constituted, has provenance in European balkanization and colonization of Africa. Modern African literature, a form of postcolonial writing, emerged as an overt reaction and counter-narrative that challenged and subverted the dominant master-narratives of Europe, which placed the colonized in a pitifully peripheral position. Tade Akin Aina reveals that European colonization

of Africa is one of the incidents that changed the social and political setting of the continent (Aina 1995: p.41). This suggests that colonization altered the composition of pre-colonial Africa, and also inaugurated certain changes that characterize capitalist modernization.

Postcolonial theory, by implication, developed in response to the then emerging body of writings produced by colonized subjects in assertion of their humanity, culture and history, which hitherto, were grossly altered, undermined and deleted by the master-narratives of imperial Europe. Therefore, postcolonial theory and practice are founded "in the 'historical fact of European colonialism, and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, p.2). Bressler (2007) situates the foundational basis of postcolonial theory and practice in a four-thousand-year history of strained cultural relations between colonies in Africa, Asia, South America and the West which crystallized into colonization, where the West became the colonizers while the peoples of the continent became the colonized. Thus, Bressler (2007) echoes Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) in locating the fundamental underpinnings of postcolonialism in the historical process of colonization.

Young (2001: p.5) insists that the founding moment of postcolonial theory can be situated in the launching of the postcolonial journal *Tricontinental* by the Havana *Tricontinental* of 1966, which inaugurated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against Imperialism. It is imperative to mention that some of the definitive tests of postcolonialism were published prior to 1966 when *Tricontinental* was launched. For example, Frantz Fanon's two seminal books: *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* appeared in 1952 and 1961 respectively, Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* was published in 1955 while Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, now a classic postcolonial novel, followed in 1958.

These and some other works provided the insights for the formulation of postcolonial theory and practice. Interestingly, other remarkable texts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's (1989), Gayatri Spivak's *The Postcolonial Critic* (1990), Homi Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration* (1990), Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and the very important works of Benita Parry, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Robert Young etc., have since appeared. The texts attest to the consolidation and wide acceptance of postcolonialism by tricontinental intellectuals.

Essentially, postcolonial theory and practice are premised on the fallouts of colonization and its consequent effects on the colonized in the postcolonial time frame. This means that postcolonialism highlights present functional arrangements and power structures and relations as they affect once colonized peoples. Postcolonial criticism therefore, reconsiders colonization as a historical event in the light of its continued effects that the postcolony and its peoples still live in the aftermaths of its violently ruthless disruptions and thus, treats the sally grim realities prevalent in postcolonial societies in the present as having provenance in colonization.

Expectedly, the continuing existence of the cultural assumptions and the politics of knowledge predicated on postcolonialism, and the economic hegemony of neocolonialism have engendered the survival and growth of postcolonial theory and practice in the so-called "third world". In other words, the ongoing imperial suppression and different forms of cultural, economic and political domination of former colonial subjects by their erstwhile colonial masters have given impetus to postcolonialism. The numerous extant social realities

that now characterize postcolonial societies, especially as the material effects of colonialism and neocolonialism have given rise to a diversity of issues which postcolonialism takes within its purview. Thus, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin(1995:2) reveal that postcolonialism:

involves discussion about experiences of various kinds, migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being.

Indeed, the dynamic nature of the postcolonial era, from which diverse issues emerge, especially as the material effects of colonialism and neocolonialism, has made it possible for postcolonial scholarship to pay attention to identities in a globalized world, where large groups of people have, for various reasons, left their home lands, producing diasporas, population flows, and émigré groups (Abrams and Harpham 2009:278). It is also in this regard that Young (2001:2) infers that "... postcolonialism has become associated with diaspora, transnational migration and internationalism..." This study takes within its purview the historical event of colonization along with its attendant material effects such as transnational migration and return.

Therefore, postcolonialism will enable the analysis of the notion of return migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*. Of course, as mentioned earlier, postcolonial criticism engages the issue of migration and return - how some persons, due to certain social realities, leave their home land and settle elsewhere, and how certain different social realities again compel them to leave their host land and go back to their home land. Through the adoption of a postcolonial perspective, this paper reveals that those postcolonial social issues - bad governance, political instability, corruption, unemployment, etc - which compel postcolonial African characters to leave their home lands, and those social realities in the host land such as racism, identity crisis, marginalization, racial profiling and stereotyping class, etc - which force postcolonial African transnational migrant characters to leave their host lands and return to their home lands have provenance in colonialism and neocolonialism.

Voluntary and Forced Return Migration in Adichie's *Americanah*

An explanation of the term, "Americanah; seems to be a convenient starting point in the discourse on return migration in Adichie's *Americanah*. This is so because it symbolizes return migration. According to Adichie (2013:385)"Americanah" refers to a person who returns from America and behaves like the Americans. An Americanah is a returnee from America who "looks at things with American eyes" (p.385).

The title of the novel, therefore, suggests the preeminence of return migration as a thematic focus. It also implies that Adichie is interested in proposing return migration as the necessary end of the migration narrative. *Americanah* centres on the migration experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze, two young Nigerians who are compelled to migrate to America and England respectively, by the unfavourable living conditions which are prevalent in their home country.

The novel highlights their return migration after some years of sojourn in their respective host lands. Adichie projects both voluntary and forced return migration in *Americanah*, but she seems to project or prefer to? Voluntary return migration over the forced type.

The first return migration portrayed in *Americanah* is the voluntary return of Ifemelu from America to Nigeria. Her return home is an unexpected twist in the return migration narrative, and also expands the typologies of returnees explored in most postcolonial literary works. This is so because during her bitter years sojourn in the United States of America through a scholarship, Ifemelu grows into a successful and accomplished immigrant, and acquires the American citizenship. This implies that a return migration to Nigeria is not an option for her, especially with the unfavorable conditions of living, and the poor economy of her home country. Ifemelu is, therefore, not constrained to become a returnee. However, despite the facts that "her blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, From Public Speaking and she had a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine,

Yet there was cement in her soul... an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness... amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could live, that over the months melded into a piercing home sickness". It is interesting that despite Ifemelu's accomplishments in America, "...layer after layer of discontent had settled in her and formed a mass that now propelled her" into taking the seemingly senseless decision to return to Nigeria.(pp: 6,7).

Ifemelu's decision to return home after living in America for thirteen years is not an easy one. It is deeply fraught with uncertainties, and is received with surprise and disbelief by the people around her. She is perturbed by the uncertainty which her return migration is likely to generate, and therefore, unsure whether her decision is right or wrong. In her effort to overcome the doubts created by the perceived future gloom which a return to Nigeria portends, Ifemelu begins to search for signs that suggest the rightness of her decision. The narrative voice reveals that

She scoured Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had poised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life (p.6).

This discovery that many young people have moved back to Nigeria and are successfully engaged in one enterprise or the other convinces Ifemelu that Nigeria is where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (p.16).

In telling a return migration tale that expands the borders of conventional return migration narrative, Adichie creates Ifemelu, an indefatigable African migrant woman who stands valiantly alone in her resolve to voluntarily move back home after living in America for thirteen years. Her decision to return home is obviously an unreasonable one, especially when her status as an accomplished migrant who has acquired the American citizenship, is considered. This explains the shock and disbelief expressed by almost all the people who hear about her decision to move back to Nigeria: "everyone she had told she was moving back seemed surprised, expecting an explanation and when she said she was doing it because she wanted to, puzzled lines would appear on foreheads" (p.13). For example, Auntie Uju fails to see rationality in Ifemelu's voluntary return migration: "You are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn't pay that well", Auntie Uju had said and then repeated herself, as though to make Ifemelu see the gravity of her own foolishness (pp.13-14).

It is instructive that Ifemelu eventually returns home permanently. Adjusting to her new life and home is very challenging to Ifemelu due to her long absence from home. On her arrival, "... Lagos assaulted her, the sun-dazed haste, the yellow buses full of squashed limbs, the sweating hawkers racing after cars, the advertisements on bulking billboard... and the heaps of rubbish that rose on the roadsides like a taunt" (p.385).

Apart from the deplorable condition of her new Lagos environment, the mannerisms and culture of the people are a discomfit to Ifemelu. It, thus, becomes challenging for her to adjust and adapt to the new life that her return migration engenders. Expectedly, within a short period, Ifemelu as a quintessential returnee readjusts and readapts to the cultural and behavioural norms that are prevalent in the home land that she returns to. This prompts Ranyinudo, her friend, to tell her "You are no longer behaving like an Americanah!" (p.395). At this point, when Ifemelu has completely reintegrated into the Lagos society and culture, and no longer sent Ranyinudo texts about what to do", she tells herself "I'm really home. I'm home" (p.411).

Apart from the voluntary return migration by Ifemelu, Adichie also portrays the forced removal of Obinze from London. This comparative portrayal helps Adichie in advancing her projection of the concept of return migration, whether forced or voluntary, as the meaningful end of every migration experience. Obinze's migration route to England is through a six-month visa as a false research assistant to his lecturer-mother who is attending an academic conference in London. This comes as a last resort for him after four failed attempts at securing an American visa. After overstaying the six months that his visa permits, Obinze is forced to live invisibly on the margins of the British society for two years and six months. As a tourist, Obinze's visa does not permit him to work, and for him to survive, he must resort to fraudulent activities. He has no option than to adopt the wise counsel of his older cousin, Nicholas:

If you come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work, ... the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an N1 number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing, marry an E.U. citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin (p.239).

Obinze metamorphoses into Vincent Obi, gets a National Insurance Number and begins to work.

He saves money and starts a relationship with a European Union citizen Cleotide from Portugal. His intention is to have a sham marriage with her in order for him to attain a valid immigration status. However, Obinze's last hope of becoming a legal migrant is foiled fifteen minutes before their court wedding. As they step into the civic centre where the marriage is to be conducted, Obinze is arrested by an immigration officer for overstaying the six months that his visa allowed. Consequently, he faces the indignity of incarceration as he "... end[s] up at a holding facility in Manchester Airport" (p.280) where he meets other inmates, many of them Nigerians. From Manchester, Obinze is moved to Dover, a former prison, before being eventually forced to return to Nigeria.

Arguably, Adichie portrays forced return migration in the case of Obinze. He expresses his willingness to return to Nigeria, and refuses to engage in any immigration litigation. The following conversation between Obinze and the lawyer that the immigration officer brings to defend him is insightful, The government has a strong case and we can appeal, but to be honest it will only delay the case and you will eventually be removed from the UK, he said... "I'm willing to go back to Nigeria," Obinze said..." The lawyer looked surprised, Okay then, he said" (p.279)

The lawyer is shocked because Obinze's refusal to prolong his stay through litigations, and his willingness to return to his home country are unusual. Most illegal immigrants in his situation would likely start a legal battle or even do something absurd so as to avoid being removed from the UK. This is exactly what Obinze's cellmate at Dover tells Obinze he will do:

... his cellmate, another Nigerian, told him that he was not going to allow himself to be deported. He had a hardened fleshless face. I will take off my shirt and my shoes when they try to board me. I will seek asylum, he told Obinze. If you take off your shirt and your shoes, they will not board you. He repeated this often, like a mantra (p.283).

Obinze's desire to return to Nigeria without resorting to litigations or other pretentious acts expedites his forced removal. His return migration is the forced type, and differs from the voluntary return of Ifemelu. It aligns with the submission of Dumont and Spielvogel (2008) that "... some of those returning home have been forced out by a removal order, for having broken the laws on immigration or residency. Some of those forcibly removed will have been imprisoned or held in detention centres since their arrival in the territory" (p.190). Indeed, despite Obinze's willingness to return home, he is still a deportee. Though he voluntarily decides to go back to Nigeria so as to save himself from the indignity of illegal immigration, he is still forcefully removed from the UK. The narrator portrays his deportation thus:

He was with two women and five men, all handcuffed, all bound for Nigeria, and they were marched, at Heathrow Airport, through security and immigration and onto the plane, while other passengers stared. They were seated at the very back, in the last row of seats, closest to the toilet (p.283).

Expectedly, this disparaging treatment does not end in the UK. The narrative voice reveals that "As the plane began its descent into Lagos, a flight attendant stood above them and said loudly. "you cannot leave. An immigration officer will come to take charge of you" (p.283).Obinze's return migration is, therefore, a deportation, and not a voluntary return like that of Ifemelu, and the Jongas in Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*

Involuntary Return Migration in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*

Imbolo Mbue uses her debut novel, *Behold the Dreamers* to represent the concept of transnational migration and return as a subject matter around which other themes such as racism, class stratification, cross-border relationship, etc are built. Mbue aligns with Dustmann and Weiss (2007: p.237) who reveal that lack of economic opportunities and the need to escape from persecutions or natural disasters are the two main motivations for migration.

Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* centres on Jende Jonga and his wife Neni, two Cameroonians who are forced to migrate to the United States of America because of poverty and persecution. The deprivation and persecution which Jende suffers as a result of his social class in Cameroon, and the lack of economic opportunities prevalent in his home country are the factors that push him into migration. He tells his employer, Clark Edwards:

my country is no good, sir... I stay in my country, I would have become nothing. I would have remained nothing.... In my country. Sir... for you to become somebody, you have to be born somebody first... someone like me, what can I even become in a country like Cameroon? I came from nothing. No name, no money. My father is a poor man. Cameroon has nothing... (pp.39-40)

Truly, Cameroon has nothing to offer people like Jende except to make them become poorer. His social class inhibits his relationship with Neni when she becomes pregnant before their marriage. It is Instructive that Neni's father refuses to give consent to their marriage mainly because Jende is poor, and Neni's family is not.

Therefore, Jende resorts to migration as the only means of escaping poverty, humiliation and persecution. His migration to America changes the narrative of his life. For example, his antagonistic father-in-law (Neni's father) becomes friendly, and grants approval to their marriage. Jende explains "once I come to America and send my father-in-law a nice transfer through Western Union, he sees that maybe I am going to be a rich man one day, he changed his mind" (p.43). The return migration experience that Mbue projects in *Behold the Dreamers* is the involuntary type which aligns with Gmelch's categorization of returnees. The Jongas are among those return migrants who intended to live in their host country permanently, but chose to return due to their failure to integrate into their country of destination. Superficially, it might seem as if the Jongas are forced to return home only by external factors such as the great depression that hit Wall Street, Jende losing his job as a chauffeur to Clark Edwards, a top Wall Street executive, and the consequent hardship that he suffers. However, Jende and his family choose to return home because of their failure to integrate into the American society.

It is necessary to recall that JendeJonga went to America on a visitor's visa, and exceeded the length of stay that his visa permitted, thus turning himself into an illegal immigrant. But, in a bid to perpetuate his stay in America as he initially intended before emigration, Jende applies for asylum. Sadly, after a protracted immigration verification process, his application is denied, thereby forcing him to choose return migration. This suggests a forced return migration as a letter the US immigration sends to him indicates:

On the basis of being admitted to the United States in August of 2004 with authorization to remain for a period not to exceed three months and staying beyond November, 2004 without further authorization, it has been charged that he [Jende] is subject to removal from the United States...He was to appear before an immigration Judge to show why he should not be removed from the country (p.224).

Interestingly, Mbue essentially transforms what would have been a forced removal into a partial voluntary return migration by portraying a Jende who is already willing to return home. This manifests on two different occasions. Firstly, when Jende's deportation case is adjourned after the first hearing, his lawyer, Mr. Bubakar, suggests that they use the adjournments to prolong his stay, Jende refuses because he sees the adjournments as "a rather pathetic way of postponing the inevitable... [and] would much rather be truly free" (p.259). He follows up by opting to leave America. The narrative voice explains that: Bubakar agreed to do as Jende wanted. He would petition the judge to close the deportation case in exchange for Jende leaving the country on his own.... voluntary departure is what they call it."Bubakar said, 'you leave quietly within ninety days. The government will be happy" (p.326),

As a result, Jende prepares to return home, and gets ready before the judge grants his request for voluntary departure. He happily tells Mr. Bubakar: "No, please don't worry for me, ...I saw an advertisement for good tickets on Air Morac. The price was so good, I bought out tickets... We are leaving in August" (p.347).

Secondly, the transformation of Jende's forced return migration into a voluntary departure manifests the day he pays a goodbye visit to his former boss - Clark Edwards. In the course of their interactions, Clark surprisingly discovers that Jende is returning to Cameroon because his application for asylum, so that he could become a permanent resident, was denied. He feels sorry for Jende, and offers to help him: "Listen... I've got a good friend from Stanford who's an associate director of immigration... it might not be too late,... maybe you could reschedule your flight, give me some time to contact my friend and see if we can help you" (p.373). Jende politely declines by telling him that the offer is coming too late, and that the judge will not allow a reversal. His last statement is insightful. He tells Clark:

even if he [the judge] did the truth,... is that my body may still be here, but my heart is already gone back home. It is true I came here to escape a hard life and I did not want to go back. But when I had no choice but to go back, I found myself happy thinking about home, sir (p.373)

This reveals that Jende has already decided to go back home and is, therefore, unwilling to accept any help that could work in the contrary. Mbue seems to be suggesting that return migration is always the best decision an African immigrant, who could not integrate into the American society, should make. The author, arguably proposes voluntary departure as the only means of averting the indignity of a forced removal.

Essentially, Mbue builds her portrayal of Jende's voluntary departure within the notions of return migration propounded by Jean-Pierre Cassarino. Cassarino (2004:17) explains that while "... the returnee's preparedness refers to a voluntary act that must be supported by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home", resources mobilization refers to "financial capital, contacts, relationships, skills, acquaintances that have been mobilized during the migration experience abroad". Jende's involuntary return migration is anchored on preparedness, readiness and resource mobilization.

Immediately Jende's asylum application is denied, and his case is transferred to an immigration judge who is to start forceful removal proceedings against him, Jende makes up his mind, and becomes willing to embark on voluntary departure. His readiness is underscored by the way he stands by his decision to return home despite his wife's protestations, and by buying their tickets even before the judge approves his application for voluntary departure. He begins to prepare himself and his family for their return migration, firstly, by regulating his spending habit, so that they will have enough money for life after return migration, and secondly, by gathering necessary information about prevailing circumstances in Cameroon. Jende reveals: "I am holding on tightly to my savings so that I'll be ready for the day when worse comes to worst..." (p.304). Eventually, by diligently saving some money during the good times in which they (Jende and Neni) earned salaries, the Jongas are able to mobilize financial capital, and "would be returning home with close to ten million CFA Francs, enough to restart their life" (p.352) in Cameroon with ease and relative comfort.

Furthermore, as Jende and his family prepare to leave America, they do not only gather enough money, but also seek information about the Cameroons they are preparing to go back to. This is to enable him to adjust and re-integrate into his home land. He engages in purposeful interactions with people at home who provide him with the needed information. He reveals: "The girls in Limbe now, I hear they all look like Beyonce. And no one wants to drink *country mimbo* anymore. Palm wine is falling out of fashion. Everyone is American or European now, Emmanu told me a club in West End even sells Crystal glass by glass" (p.354). This shows that prior to his return to Cameroon, Jende is already aware of the prevailing circumstances, trends and recent developments at home.

Indeed, Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* unarguably portrays return migration as the last phase of transnational migration. The author uses the migration experiences of the Jongas to advise African immigrants to opt for voluntary departure when faced with unfavourable living conditions abroad. Instead of becoming stuck in the host land, it is better to return to the home land without waiting to be forcefully removed. It is, therefore, significant that the story ends with an actual return to Limbe, and with the word "home" (p.382)

The authors, Chimamanda Adichie and Mbolo Mbue in their texts exhibit a unique and distinctive way of writing. This encompasses their choices of language, sentence structures, tones and other elements that make their work special. The texts *Americanah* and *Behold the Dreamers* employ the third-person omniscient point of view. This means the narrator is outside the story, observing all characters and their thoughts, feelings and motivations. The narrator is not limited to one character's perspective, but can see into the minds of multiple characters, allowing the reader to understand the complexities of their relationships and internal struggles.

Evidently the message in *Americanah* is encoded using the English language. Thus, English is the medium of communication among the characters, and also the language of narration. However, the Igbo characters sometimes borrow and use words and expressions from the Igbo language during conversations. Such loan words and foreign expressions are set apart using italics, Igbo words and expressions such as *Keduebeino* (21), *Àsà, Ugo* (22), *o gini* (23), *o diegwu* (24 and 47), *Ngwa* (49), *rapuba* (240), *Biko* (89, 117 and 250), *Akotaifekaubi, e lee oba* (61), etc., stand out from other English words and expressions due to their italicization. Also, the use of loan words and untranslated Igbo expressions and their being captured in italics are stylistic devices. The use of Igbo expressions bestow authenticity on the Igbo characters who occasionally resort to their mother tongue during conversations.

One of the conspicuous style markers which Mbue uses is italics. The italicization of some words and expressions makes them to stand out and become obviously different from the rest of the words and expressions in the text. Mbue uses italics to announce loan words, songs, messages, poems, non-English expressions, movies, among others. Mbue makes ample use of loan words, non-standard English words, as well as words borrowed from other languages and cultures. For example, the following loan words/expressions, *grand boubou* (15), *papier* (19), *caraboat* (21), *mamiwata* (38), *wahala* (34), *worwor* (81), *okrika* (277), *Molongo* (106), etc., are italicized in the text. The songs in the text are also captured in italics. NeniJonga is portrayed as a character that uses songs to express herself in moments of happiness and sadness, when she is overwhelmed by intense feelings. Neni uses these songs:

EweniLowala manyaka
Ewenilowa la manyaka
Lowala nginya. Na wetamiseli
EweniLowala manyaka (31)

Conclusion

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Imbolo Mbue use their *Americanah* and *Behold the Dreamers* and respectively to project return migration as the unavoidable end of the migration narrative. The authors' projection of return migration is inflected through what seems to be an intertextual connection between the two novels. While Adichie uses *Americanah* to refer to Nigerians who have been to the U.S. and returned to Nigeria with American mannerisms, Mbue uses *American Wonder* to refer to the Cameroonian counterpart of *Americanah*. In a 2013 interview, Adichie explains that *Americanah* is a:

Nigerian word... that is used for people who have been to the U.S. and come back and pretend that they no longer understand Igbo or Yoruba or Hausa. Or who came back to Nigeria from the US, and suddenly won't eat Nigerian food, everything is about when I was in America.

(<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/195598496?storyId=195598496>).

Interestingly, the narrator of Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* similarly explains that American Wonder refers to:

... those Mburukir who went to America and upon their return spoke with laughable American accents, spraying "wannas" and "gonnas" all over sentences. They strutted around town wearing suits and cowboy boots and baseball caps, claiming to understand very little of Cameroonian culture because they were now too American (p.355).

Thus, Adichie's *Americanah* is recreated in Mbue's *American Wonder*. Essentially, Adichie and Mbue use Ifemelu and Obinze as well as Jende Jonga, the protagonists of their respective novels to highlight their preference for return migration irrespective of the status of the migrant, whether legal or illegal, successful or unsuccessful. The authors' projection of return migration seems to constitute counsel for African immigrants to return home voluntarily instead of continuing to live unhappily on the fringes of the host society. There seems to be a message underlying this counsel. It is a corresponding plea to African leaders to make the home lands suitable places by initiating policies and programmes that would make Africans to succeed in their home land. This would mitigate the spate of migration in Africa as well as encourage African migrants to return home. Therefore, Adichie and Mbue use *Americanah* and *Behold the Dreamers* respectively to propose a kind of transnational migration narrative that necessarily ends with a return migration to the home land.

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