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Quest for Home in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*: Reversing the Push-Pull Conditions

Christopher Chibueze Ezeonu[1], and Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye[2]

[1 2] Department of English Language and Literary Studies,

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

Corresponding author's email: ezeonuchrisjmc@gmail.com

Abstract

In migration studies, the trajectory of motion that often finds people in spaces other than their original habitat has always been demonstrated to be prompted by nauseating factors in the homelands and amplified by the perceived attractive factors in the foreign land of interest. Such factors are regarded as the push and pull factors of migration as enunciated by Everett Lee. In the bid to escape such nauseating conditions in the homelands, migrants engage in a voyage of quest for greener pastures at the pulling destinations. The direction of this movement has always appeared to be linear – from the Global South to the North, no thanks to the ugly history of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade of the sixteenth to the nineteenth century and the colonial experiences of most African countries with their subsisting neo-imperialistic influences. But much of diaspora literature has always culminated in what many scholars have dubbed as return migration, whereby most migrants eventually begin to yearn to return to their homelands as a reaction to the many oddities they begin to experience abroad. This present work seeks to explore those complexities that usually occasion such quests for return migration through a textual analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Hinging on Lee's push-pull factor theory of migration as its framework, this work discovers that such a quest usually takes the shape of some sort of reversal of the push and pull conditions that initially orchestrated the migration in the first place.

Keywords: migration, diaspora, push-pull, complexities, reversal, home

Introduction

Return migration, has always been seen to be the endpoint of most diasporic characters' quest for home. In other words, in most diaspora fiction, migrants' quest for home often culminate in a return to their homelands. Hence, it is safe to say that return migration is a function of the quest for home by most migrants in diaspora fictive texts. Migrants discover

late in the day that things do not always turn out as easily as they had anticipated. They sometimes find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea in such diaspora conditions. Deciding to return to their home lands, as difficult as the decision might be, appears to be the only reaction to a condition that has become choking – what Angela Suarez-Rodriguez calls a "defensive reaction". Even when they eventually return, they end up becoming "cosmopolitan strangers", according to Esperanca Bielsa, in the sense that they now become 'strangers' to the ways of their fathers. That was Ifemelu's case, which led to her being teased as an *Americanah* in Adichie's text under review herein. Nevertheless, the interest of this work is not on what happens after the return of migrants back to their homelands, rather, our thrust here is on those factors that usually engender migrants' eventual quest for home. This study seeks to expand this quest beyond the scope of the nostalgic feelings that usually connect migrants to their homes. Hence, beyond the scope of emotions, this paper underscores the effect of the many existential realities that orchestrate the drive to return home. Such realities fall within the corpus of the many complexities that often characterize the experience of migrants abroad such as: racial discrimination, gender issues, violence, unemployment, accommodation palavers, weather conditions, hair style, language barriers, food and feeding habits, etc. In the face of these, the migrants begin to experience a sense of push, away from the host lands, as they begin to relish those familiar experiences of home, which they then begin to long for once again, thereby getting pulled back to their home lands. And so, they begin to experience some sort of reversal whereby they begin to get pushed away from the places they initially felt pulled to and begin to get pulled to the places they initially felt pushed away from.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie belongs to the young generation of Nigeria writers, and has been metaphorically described by many as the 'new' voice of Nigerian literature. The

publication of *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003 announced her entry into the Nigerian literary hall of fame and she has remained consistent ever since as her works have made their ways into the chest of world literatures, having been translated into many languages of the world and won many prestigious global awards. She tells her stories against the background of Nigeria's memorable and definitive socio-political events. Hence, she ranks highly within the corpus of Nigerian Diaspora writers, whose voices as articulated in her *Americanah* have kept reverberating, as far as the telling and retelling of the African nay Diasporic experiences are concerned. She adopts a variety of stylistic approaches in her writings, which involves the interweaving of Igbo phrases and sentences and the usage of certain narrative strategies in order to make her work truly and authentically Nigerian. In her *Americanah*, currently under review here, we shall see that the Igbo language plays a very vital role in her writing process as she infuses the narrative with Igbo lexical items, Igbo proverbs, code-switching and vernacular transcription.

Most of the characters in *Americanah* are cosmopolitans, who view the West as safe havens. Their obsession with America emphasizes the value they place on the country in contrast to the value they place on Nigeria, its culture and lifestyle. Some of them eventually leave Africa for the West in a bid to escape from the poor political, social and economic conditions in Africa.

Americanah is a story about two young Nigerian high school friends Ifemelu and Obinze whose lives take different paths when fate separates them to different worlds: America and Britain, respectively. Through the character of Ifemelu, Adichie projects the Nigerian woman by highlighting her challenges as she tries to find her feet in an alien land, first as an African and also as a woman. However, Ifemelu is able to assert herself by resisting and overcoming these challenges. Obinze, on the other hand, experiences racial prejudice in

England where he feels unwelcome, and is forced to work menial jobs which seemed to be the exclusive reserve of black migrants like him. After running afoul of law enforcement and immigration laws, he opts to return home as his only defensive reaction. Destiny however brings the two major characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, back together after they relocate to Nigeria**.**

The Idea of Return Migration and Adichie's *Americanah*

Many scholars have delineated on the theme of return migration, especially as concerns Adichie's *Americanah* from various perspectives. In the editorial of *Irinkerindo: A Journal of African Migration,* Issue 7 of June 2014, titled, "Thinking about Return Migration: Theories, Praxes, General Tendencies and African Particularities", Mojubaolu Olufunke Okome did well to classify the different forms return migration can take. It could be temporary or permanent. It could also be volitional or compelled. There could also be the secondary and repeat migration patterns, whereby migrants leave their initial port of call to migrate to other destinations. He also noted that the return could only be a romanticized one; what he called the "Myth of Return", whereby the idea of the return only exists in the imagination of the migrant, or in plans that never reach fruition, or even in the migrant merely toying with the idea of return rather than in any actual expectation of return or concrete manifestation of return home. This categorization is very essential to our work here as it provides the proper classification for the exact type of return that results from the quests for home expressed in our choice text. Our interest, therefore, lies on the permanent type of return and on the imaginative type of return, both of which wear both the volitional and compulsive features as are depicted in our text.

For Maximillian Feldner, his focus in his "Return Migration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context", is simply to demonstrate that the migratory movements of Africans is not just linear and one-directional, that is, from Africa to the West or Europe. Hence, adopting Kwame Anthony Appiah's idea of "rooted cosmopolitanism", he was able to show through a literary analysis of Ifemelu's character that Nigerians' migratory processes as depicted generally in Nigeria diaspora literatures, are usually more multidimensional and oscillating between the continents and that they usually illustrate an attachment to Nigeria than the linear impression usually thought of.

In "The Experience of Return in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah:* Expanding the 'Cosmopolitan Stranger'", Angela Surez-Rodgriduez, while recognizing that returning home usually serves as the only defensive reaction of many migrants, focuses her attention on the experiences of the returnee migrant upon return home. Her interest is on Ifemelu's experience of return under the framework of Esperanca Bielsa's idea of "Cosmopolitan Stranger" as she tries to explore what becomes of returnee migrants who strive to become agents of transformation in their homeland after their return. So, although she examined Ifemelu's emotional attitude towards homecoming while she was still in diaspora, she also went further to literally analyze her experience of dislocation and processes of readjustment to her homeland upon her return to Lagos, on account of which she qualifies as the cosmopolitan stranger as expounded by Bielsa.

In their article, "Journey and Return: Visitng Unbelonging and Otherness in Adichie's *Americanah*", Soheila Arabian and Vida Rahiminesz, hinging on the theory of diaspora itself, reveal how migrants are forced into the quest for returning home on account of the racial discriminatory attitude, which alienates them as the 'other' in the Western societies they relocate to. This discriminatory attitude and the alienation gives them a sense of

unbelonging which disconcerts their sojourn abroad, leaving them with no other option than to seek a return back to the homeland.

From all these, we see that the quest for home by migrants is one that has always received scholarly attention. But no scholarship on return migration or the quest for home appears to have been hinged squarely on Everett Lee's push-pull factor theory. Hence, this work seeks to make its own study of migrants' quest for home on the basis of Everett Lee's Push-pull factor theory. The significance of doing this lies in its inter-disciplinary approach of critically importing a sociological principle expounded by a sociologist into the field of English fictive literal discourse. Hence, this study seeks to establish that the quest for home experienced by most African migrants always wears the picture of a reversal of the push and pull factors, whereby they begin to experience a push away from the place they initially felt pulled to and vice versa, on account of certain existential realities that do not favour the hopes they had before they travelled out from their homelands.

Push-Pull Conditions of Migration in *Americanah*

Migration according to Everett Lee (1965:47) is broadly understood "as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence". The reasons people migrate are determined by what Everett Lee has described as "push" and "pull" factors, which are forces that either coerce people to leave old residences and/or induce them to move into new locations. These could be economic, political, cultural, and environmental. Push factors are conditions that can force people to leave their homes and are related to the country from which a person migrates. According to Lee (1965:48), push factors include: "non-availability of enough livelihood opportunities, poverty, rapid population growth that surpasses available

resources, 'primitive' or 'poor' living conditions, desertification, famines/droughts, fear of political persecution, poor healthcare, loss of wealth, and natural disasters", etc.

Pull factors are exactly the opposite of push factors – they attract people to a certain location. In his postulation:

> Typical examples of pull factors of a place are more job opportunities and better living conditions, easy availability of land for settling and agriculture, political and/or religious freedom, superior education and welfare systems, better transportation and communication facilities, better healthcare system and stress-free attractive environment, and security (1965:49).

Lee, a professor of Sociology, first presented this model of his at the Annual meeting of Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Kansas City, in 1965. In 1966, his seminal work, "A Theory of Migration", was published in the journal titled, *Demography*. He conceptualized these factors associated with the decision to migrate and the process of migration into four broad categories, thus:

(i) Factors associated with the area of origin;

(ii) Factors associated with the area of destination;

(iii) Intervening obstacles;

(iv) Personal factors (Lee 1965:53).

As already mentioned elsewhere in this work, Adichie ranks highly among the 'new' breed of contemporary Nigerian writers who have very eloquently lent their voices to the diasporic discourse. In her major piece on Nigerian Diaspora, which is currently under review here, *Americanah,* we see that in the contemporary Nigerian society Ifemelu, Obinze

and other characters in the novel found themselves in situations where they are constantly trampled upon despite their national identities. It was this denigration that constituted the major push factor on account of which they all sought to flee from their motherland, Nigeria. The unpleasant political turmoil and the crass ineptitude of the government continued to question the necessity of their identifying with Nigeria as their country. The novel, thus, presents a picture of continued retrogression in almost every sector of the nation, while the youths appear to be the worst hit since even graduating from the university within a record time can no longer be guaranteed. This is as a result of "agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose own children were schooling abroad (Adichie, 2009:98), thereby giving rise to the incessant strike actions that have come to be the hallmark of Nigerian universities.

Adichie observes that not only do the strikes occur very often, they also last for a long time such that students can no longer make any adequate plans about their studies since no one is ever sure of when they will graduate. And so, campuses were continually emptied and drained of life as "everyone was talking about leaving" (2009:98), thereby making almost every student, no matter their family's class or status, to start applying for visa. Many students were even ready to forgo the years they had already spent in Nigerian universities. Such was in fact the case with the girl who was already in her final year at the University of Ife but was glad she got an American Visa on her first try. She was not bothered about starting all over again but was utterly grateful that at least, she was certain she will graduate. These clearly depict the potency of the push elements that drove contemporary Nigerians, especially students, away from their motherland. No wonder Obinze's mother lamented that "Nigeria is chasing away its best resources" (Adichie 2009:100).

The situation does not end with the ugly condition of education that pushes people away from the country. The labour market tends to present an even worse situation. Students, who persevere to finish their education in Nigeria, are confronted with the hopeless situation of joblessness, the high quality of their results notwithstanding. Obinze traveled to Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja, taking assessment tests and attending interviews, all in the search for job but to no avail. Tired of this unpleasant condition, his mother had to compromise on her hitherto highly-held principles and morals, which she had also taught Obinze to hold unto. She saw her invitation to an academic conference in London as a means to an end such that she quietly informed Obinze she was "going to put your name on my British Visa application as my research assistant. That should get you a six- months' visa. You can stay with Nicholas in London. See what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here" (Adichie 2009:232).

Of course, these whole issues about the poor condition of education in the country and the unfriendly labour market after graduation revolve around the very appalling political situation of the country. Even those that once believed in the country become so disappointed that every person tends to think that the only remedy is for one to start looking for greener pastures in Western nations. Through Adichie's use of authorial intrusion, she is able to capture Obinze's mood as he eventually abandoned his mother and country and becomes an immigrant in England. He also expressed the desire to acquire the National Insurance number through any means, legal or illegal, since that appeared to be the only way to finally have a real life in his host nation. In Adichie's words:

> They would not understand why people like him, who were raised, well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so

> as to live, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty (2009:276)

This push element and the quest to acquire a new identity abroad, different from one's national identity, is not peculiar to the youths alone. Ginika's parents had to resign from their lecturing job and relocate to America as her father could no longer endure being treated as a sheep, who now spends the time he should have used in carrying out researches in rather organizing strikes for unpaid salaries and general poor working conditions for lecturers. More so, most of those Obinze's mother knew as professors in Nigeria were leaving in droves for teaching positions in Canada and the US. No wonder she had to resign to fate and simply came to the conclusion that she must have to let down her puritanical guard in order to do what must be done for her son to survive.

And so, *Americanah* is unarguably a text on migration as many of the major characters in the text made one form of movement from one locality to another. Apart from migrating from Nigeria to the West, there were also movements from one city in the West to another, as well as from one job to another. Through these constant movements in search of greener pastures, they broke away from the conditions pushing them out and got drawn and captured by the conditions pulling them to new lifestyles and identities in their new locations.

Quest for Home – Reversal of the Push-Pull Conditions in *Americanah*

As already explained, the push-pull factor theory consists in those factors or conditions that tend to drive the migrants away from home (the push factors) as well as those factors that attract them to the intended host nations (pull factors). But then, one great feature of diasporic literature that has not been given adequate scholarly attention is a recognition

that what has been dubbed as return migration or the quest for home by migrants simply implies a concrete reversal of the push-pull conditions in the diaspora experience of migrants. Most scholars simply tend to associate such quest for home with the sense of nostalgia which migrants feel on account of their separation from their fatherland and loved ones. In other words, it would mean that they are simply back home not because of any negativity in their host land, but simply because they miss home. This present study rather insists that the quest for home goes beyond this ordinary feeling of nostalgia. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the fact that when many migrants, as captured in diaspora fiction, yearn to return to their homelands, it is usually on account of a concrete reversal of the push and pull conditions that existed before they travelled. Put differently, just as they were pulled to the foreign land by its many attractive promises and pushed away from their homeland by its nauseating conditions, in their eventual quest for home, the conditions are concretely (not just emotionally) reversed in the sense that they now become pushed away from the foreign lands, not just as a result of nostalgia, but as a result of various existential oddities, and become pulled once again to their homeland, where they ultimately crave for a real sense of belonging.

Those complexities that occasion such reversal feature very prominently in Adichie's *Americanah.* First and foremost, at the general emotional level, we see that despite Ifemelu's success academically and financially, there remained the constant sense of emotional longing for her home country. The sense of wholeness eluded her until it became "an early morning disease of fatigue, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness" (Adichie 2009:6). Hence, Ifemelu, as a diasporic individual, was ever in search of her homeland. This is utterly in line with Uko's assertion that "for many Africans in the diaspora, the realities of physical

disconnectedness, spiritual loneliness, mental alienation and nostalgia create a perspective that best recognizes and defines them as human beings" (2004:115).

And so, for her to constantly have a feel of home, she always soaked herself in constant surfing of the internet, in search of everything Nigerian. Before the internet space provided her a means of keeping in touch with the mother nation, she had kept in touch with Ranyiudo through occasional exchange of letters, which did not lessen the burden of alienation as much as the internet eventually did. She also always saved all the voice messages sent by her parents as she was "unsure if that would be the last time she would hear their voices." For "to be here, living abroad, not knowing when she could go home again was to watch love become anxiety" (Adichie 2009:152). With the advent of the internet, the imaginary and psychological return to the home nation and its politics became more frequent. Yet, it could not abate the desire for physical return and self-actualization. The physical return was, in fact, the only thing that could positively impact the identity crisis she had been faced with since her sojourn in diaspora. Such was the potency of the pull she was beginning to receive from her home nation, Nigeria. For "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them and shake off the soil" (Adichie 2009:6).

But beyond these potent feelings of nostalgia, Ifemelu also felt disillusioned in the host nation that sought to erode her cultural and national identity by all means. Even the weather was not what she had expected it to be such that she was taken aback by the heat wave she met when she newly arrived America. She had always thought of a very cold America, as she had always heard of and seen in the movies and was therefore all set to protect herself from the cold. She had also envisioned that even "the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss". But far from her expectations, the cars, the

buildings and the signposts she saw were rather "disappointingly matte" (Adichie 2009:104). And so, her first experiences of America were the first to inject both a physical and mental shift from her initially perceived ideas of America and thus, became pointers to the push-pull reversal she was bound to experience.

Her experience with people upon arrival, especially her relatives added to compound the complexity of her diasporic experience. Her first encounter with her aunty, Uju, immediately told her that something was different about her (Aunty Uju). From Aunty Uju's almost disheveled physical appearance to "her quick casual hug, as if it had been weeks rather than years since they had last seen each other" (Adichie 2009:104) made it clear to her that something was definitely out of place. She was sure that the Aunty Uju she knew before she left the shores of Nigeria would have regaled her with tales of things that had happened since they last saw and made her feel welcomed in the new nation they now find themselves. That was not to be. To her utmost surprise, Aunty Uju's mind was rather filled with thoughts of the time lost in coming to pick her up from the airport, which could have been invested in studying for her upcoming medical examinations. This would never have been the case in Nigeria, she thought.

But she was soon to learn that Aunty Uju's passport to having a good life laid in her passing her examination and becoming a medical practitioner. Her eagerness to fashion a good life for herself and her son, Dike, has shaped her into a new personality devoid of the warmth she (Ifemelu) knew of her back home. Ifemelu could not understand what was wrong with Aunty Uju with whom she had the greatest bond among all the members of her family. She (Aunty Uju) now had to wrap herself in blanket and has become out of her reach. The shallowness of their discussions made Ifemelu to conclude that "Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place",

which Obinze later explained as "the exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity" (Adichie 2009:119). The reality remains that she did not deliberately leave anything of herself behind anywhere. Instead, her new society had forcibly stripped her of her original identity and personality as is always the case with most migrants. Hence, she found herself in some sort of virtual captivity. And Ifemelu could only but wish it were back home in Nigeria.

Unlike Ginika, who seemed to know the codes for survival abroad and was more culturally flexible, Aunty Uju was totally unprepared for the new life which "left her skin dry, her eyes shadowed and her spirit bleached of colour" (Adichie 2009:108). Her valid and active sense of self has been eroded by dislocation as a result of her forced migration and as a result, her identity crisis became even more obvious. She later confessed to Ifemelu thus:

> I'm tired. I thought by now things would be better for me and Dike. It's not as if anybody was helping me and I just could not believe how quickly money went. I was studying and working three jobs. I was doing retail at the mall, and a research assistant and I even did some at Burger King (Adichie 2009:100).

America had so subdued her that she was left with no choice but to do whatever it had to take to survive and stay afloat in the new nation. Having wholeheartedly accepted white supremacy and the social, psychological and cultural inferiority enforced on her, she no longer saw anything wrong in her name being pronounced as "you-joo instead of oo-joo" (Adichie, 2009:104) and will always assimilate an American accent in the presence of members of the host community. Ifemelu also noticed that while talking even to her son, Dike, in the presence of white Americans, such as when she wanted to tell Dike to put back

what he had taken off from the grocery store shelf, which she did not want to buy, she would say it with "the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back.* And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing" (Adichie, 2009:108). With this assimilation of the American accent, Igbo language became almost a taboo or a language of strife in her home, which she used only when she was angry. On one occasion, she chided Ifemelu for speaking Igbo to Dike, telling her that two languages would confuse him since "this is America. It's difficult" (Adichie 2009:109). In the face of all these, thoughts of what used to be the case back home kept flooding into Ifemelu's mind, filling her with unending sense of pull back to Nigeria.

It is the same state of loss of self that made Aunty Uju to accept Bartholomew's proposal as well as stomach all his excesses. Ifemelu is taken aback by the fact that she knows that back home, a man like Bartholomew would not dare ask Aunty Uju out not to talk of treating her like shit as he was doing. And when she complained, she is reminded that America is not Nigeria. It therefore follows that the host land offers the migrants what it deems fit and not what they need. The deprivation of things needed makes them scramble for and appreciate whatever is thrown at them, otherwise going back home remains the only option.

Ifemelu, on her part, would later realize that the new society they had found themselves in lays very difficult options before them. Since the student visa she had would not get her any meaningful job, she was given the Social Security Number (SSN) of another Nigerian, who was at least ten years older and with ugly features. She did not understand why she had to become another person in order to survive – this would never have happened in Nigeria. Aunty Uju completely disregarded Ifemelu's concern about this, knowing full well that most Africans work using a different person's SSN, as long as they remain ever conscious of the

name and always respond to the name on the card they use. This constituted a very big crisis for Ifemelu, who found it difficult at first to adapt to the new name. She would always mistakenly identify herself as Ifemelu before remembering to identify as Ngozi.

And so, Ifemelu had to take on a new persona; a new identity and personality when she arrived America because Americans did everything differently from how she was used to. When she left Aunty Uju's house, she was surprised to find language codes that were totally different from what she had always known. Their speaking sounded as if they constantly used exclamation marks and words came to represent something different from what she earlier knew. When her roommates invited her to join them for lunch, she expected that she was being taken out as is usually the case in Nigeria with such invitations. But surprisingly, the bill was split and everyone got to pay for what she drank or ate (Adichie 2009:129). She sometimes had to laugh at jokes she did not even understand. The issue of double identity in terms of language became prominent in her relationship with Cristina Tomas who, on learning that Ifemelu was an international student, believed that Ifemelu must have an inadequate identity that did not fit into the cultural identity of the host nation, because she did not have an American accent. Hence,

> Ifemelu half smiled to sympathy, because Cristina Tomas had to have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly, lips scrunching and puckering, as she gave directions to the international students' office. But when Ifemelu returned with the letter, Cristina Tomas said, 'I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?' And she realized that Cristina was speaking like that because of her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling (Adichie 2009:133).

She had spoken English all her life and even led debating society in secondary school. When she told Cristina Tomas that she could speak English, the woman coldly retorted "I bet you do. I just don't know how well" (Adichie 2009:133). This denigration made her shrink. She must, therefore, learn to perform recognized American traits that would grant her acceptance into American society and "in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent" (Adichie 2009:134). Her practicing the American accent became true to the warning they had been given at the African Students' Association meeting that they would soon start to adopt an American accent because they would not want people to keep asking them to repeat whatever they had said. By imitating the American accent, she became alienated from her known culture while negotiating a new meaning and representation. Ifemelu's life in the host country validated Gareth Griffiths' assertion that "these transplanted and dislocated human beings, deprived of their indigenous cultural contexts, their language and even their names, were reconstituted as figures occupying a profoundly ambiguous expressive space" (Adichie 2000:7).

With each passing day, Ifemelu continued to get acquainted with the reality about America as against the America she had dreamed about. With many failed job interviews and without any income, anxiety began to set in. She was at first worried that her foreign accent and her lack of experience could be the reason she had remained jobless. She always wondered if she was doing anything wrongly. It gradually dawned on her that the America of her imaginations, as is always the case with many Africans, is totally different from the real America, as many African migrants get to discover in diaspora. With bills piling up and the threat of being homeless looming, since she was unable to renew her rent, she was left with no other option than to trade her body for money. That encounter became the last

straw that completely robbed her of the last shred of personal dignity she had left on foreign soil. After the act, she kept scrubbing her body as though it would sanctify the filth she felt she had become. She threw away the cloth she wore to the place and shut herself away from friends and family, especially Obinze. In fact, her perception of whom she was and her life in general became greatly altered after that act such that:

> She woke up each morning torpid, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of day that lay ahead. Everything had thickened. She was swallowed, lost in a viscous haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness. Between her and what she should feel, there was a gap. She cared about nothing. She wanted to care, but she no longer knew how. It had slipped from her memory, the ability to care. Sometimes she woke up flailing and hopeless, and she saw in her front and behind her and all around her, an utter hopelessness. She knew there was no point in being here, in being alive (Adichie, 2009:156).

So, just like her aunty, Uju, she had become forced to submit to the society's limited and difficult options and just like her, the experience made her a new person; gives her a new identity and thereby compounding her complexities. When Ginika later observed that she was going through depression, she was quick to denounce it, since depression, as an illness, was considered to be an exclusive reserve of Americans alone. Beyond the physical pain, there was for Ifemelu the emotional and psychological torment of one who has been uprooted and displaced from a known identity to an unknown one.

More so, in the process of Ifemelu's identity formation, she learned that race and class are still discriminatory institutions used to categorize and control marginalized groups. Yet,

the issue of race is never discussed in America, despite being very crucial to those in diaspora. For Ifemelu, race represented an integral part of her diasporic identity and she sought to understand that aspect of her new identity and would not be pressured into keeping quiet. Before her immigration, she was not conscious of colour as she blurted out at one party, "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. But we don't talk about it" (Adichie 2009:291). Adichie uses these lines to portray the racial discriminations and hardships African immigrants have to undergo in their adaptation and acculturation processes. There was the case of Mr. White, who was presumed to be dealing on drugs, just because he was seen talking and exchanging money with a black man. And without any investigation, the white employee, who had been watching them, decided to call a supervisor and he was handed over to the police.

On another occasion, Ifemelu once walked into a salon to get her eyebrows shaped and the woman behind her informed her that they do not do curly and would not budge until Blaine intervened. She had to form her identity along the racial tension in America and would later use her blog, which she titled "Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" to express her opinions on race and depict the experiences of African immigrants in the United States of America. In one of her blog posts, she wrote:

> In America, tribalism is alive and well. There are four kinds – class, ideology, religion and race…. There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP and American Black is always on the bottom, and what is in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvelous rhyme goes: if

> you're white, you're right; if you are brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!) Americans assume that everyone will get their tribalism. But it takes a while to figure it all out. (Adichie 2009:184 – 185).

In fact, throughout the novel, the greatest complexity Ifemelu had to contend with was that of identity crisis. Her dissatisfaction and the need for self-actualization made her continually in search of that which she could not precisely define. The worst disconnect was seen when her parents came to visit her. Even though she had missed them and longed to be with them, yet they seemed like strangers without any dignity when they eventually came. Unfortunately, she watched them with a sneer, and for this, she felt guilty (Adichie 2009:301). She knew something was wrong somewhere. Something huge was missing. And she had to find it! It is this quest for whatever that is lacking in her life that continues to fuel the quest to return home.

It is pertinent to note that in this quest, there are some who never eventually make it to return home physically. There was the case of Bartholomew, who even though had not physically returned to the country in years was so pulled to it that he "always talked about Nigerian politics with the fervid enthusiasm of a person who followed it from afar, who read and reread articles on the internet" (Adichie 2009:116). The home nation was viewed as the nurturer of all things good and that is why he was eager to defend African values and ways like when he condemned the short skirts ladies in America wear, noting that back home, no lady would dare wear such. Bartholomew was one character that represents such migrants, who never make a physical return back home, but rather engage in psychological journeys back home as they search for solutions to the myriad problems that confront Nigeria.

On the other hand, there was Dike, who succeeded in making a physical return back to the homeland, even though he was born and bred in America. Ifemelu was able to convince Aunty Uju to allow Dike to come to Nigeria. There, he was able to trace his genealogy. That experience can be compared to that of Barrack Obama as articulated in his autobiography titled, *Dreams from my Father*, where he wept at his father's grave burdened with the thoughts of frustration he witnessed in Chicago and of the gap existing in his roots and that "all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away…." (1995:430). Dike, as an American citizen, enjoyed his trip to Nigeria and headed back to America as a teenager, who had found satisfaction in the knowledge of his ancestry.

And so, from all that has been said so far, we see that this reversal of the push-pull conditions is orchestrated both by the nostalgic feelings migrants always battle with and by the many existential complexities that characterize their stay abroad. They continually long for a bonding with home, both mentally and physically. Omar Sougou, in his essay, "Ambivalent Inscriptions: Women, Youth & Diasporic Identity in Buchi Emecheta's Later Fiction", describes such bonding and its effect thus:

> The African Caribbean diaspora and African immigrants imagine or strive to preserve an identity with Africa, endeavouring likewise to keep alive the ties with the motherland and to come to terms with ambivalence. Their turning to their homelands symbolically proves cathartic sometimes in the face of ostracism and other trials suffered in the mother country (2010:13).

At the African salon, for example, Africans share their collective memory of becoming diaspora and immediately try to establish a social identity which is being African. At the salon, there is a welcoming smile that acknowledges their shared African identity. Ifemelu

felt freer to express her feelings there just as she felt more comfortable whenever she was at the meetings of the African Students' Association, where she always felt more at home with students from Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Congo and Guinea, with whom she relived and laughed over their many experiences and stories about their African heritage. In their shared space, just as in the salon, they usually went on to discuss their Africanness with some nostalgic undertones that smack of a longing for their homeland.

In this quest for their homeland that reverses the push and pull conditions, language is a very important tool. At some points in the lives of the characters, they realized that the American accent they had assimilated distanced them from their true selves and they therefore, sought to abandon it and reconnect with who they really were, even if only for a short while. There was the case of Ginika, who when she met Ifemelu for the first time in America, lapsed into her normal Nigerian accent and her Nigerian self, which was usually louder and more heightened, with the addition of "o" to her sentences. She wanted to believe she had resisted assimilation in order to maintain the feelings of self and home.

Ifemelu, on her own part, would later stop faking American accent when a telemarketer told her that she sounded totally American. Although she first appreciated him, she later wondered how such a comment passed off as a compliment or an accomplishment. Since when did it become an accomplishment to sound American? The American accent was a totally different identity, which will not come in handy in moments of terror or unconsciousness. Hence, she needed that language identity that was true to her and which she could always relate with when caught off guard. And that identity was definitely not the American accent but her original African nay Nigerian accent.

Conclusion

In all of these, we see that Adichie was very apt in her articulation of the many diasporic complexities and consciousness that characterize the experience of migrants abroad, especially the complexity of identity crisis, which seats at the centre. As one who lives in diaspora herself, she perfectly understands the ambiguities of the diasporic experiences as well as how the push-pull elements shape these experiences, both before, during and after migration has taken place.

As people from a nation of many instabilities and oddities, the major characters in the text found themselves in the push to jet out of the country and in the pull coming from a place where such lacks in the homeland were promised. But then also, as people displaced from their homeland, marginalized and denigrated as the "other" in their host lands, these characters become more conscious of whom they really are and experience greater push towards their homeland. They, thus, strive to make recovery and attain self-actualization amidst all the struggles that confronted them abroad. Such is the highpoint of the reversal that orchestrates their undying quest for home.

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