



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 13, Issue, 09, pp. 63809-63814, September, 2023

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.27221.09.2023>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

IMBOLO MBUE'S *BEHOLD THE DREAMERS*: AN ARTISTIC JOURNEY FROM UTOPIA TO DYSTOPIA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 18th June, 2023
Received in revised form
21st July, 2023
Accepted 29th August, 2023
Published online 30th September, 2023

KeyWords:

Migration, Utopia, Dystopia,
Dream, Journey.

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ABSTRACT

Most migrants are often ignorant of real-life conditions in the host countries. Interestingly, the displaced persons are tempted to move due to the greener pastures beautifully advertised in the rich countries. However, these desperate people find themselves stranded and dismayed in the wake of their migration. Imolo Mbue illumines a case study by artistically taking the reader through a disillusioning journey. Based on the analysis of her *Behold the Dreamers* through the psychoanalytic lens, this article investigates the causes of Jongas's move and their dire experiences in the American dream land. Observably, migration should not always be taken as the silver bullet for every single critical issue at home. As a matter of fact, the pasture is not always greener in the ostensible Eldorado. Therefore, this study suggests a careful analysis of the landing spots to escape dystopian experiences once landed.

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Citation: Komla M. Avono, 2023. "Imbolo mbue's behold the dreamers: an artistic journey from utopia to dystopia". *International Journal of Development Research*, 13, (09), 63809-63814.

INTRODUCTION

"Migration is a necessity, not a choice."
(Bacon, 2008, p. 26)

Migration defines every human being. No individual is born into this world to stay in only one place and be unable to move to other locations. Endowed with this instinct to explore the unknown, humans are forced to be constantly on the move. Given the fact that we are lively, we will always be moving. According to the World Bank, migration has been part of the human experience since the earliest days of civilization (p. 1). Therefore, forwarding *The World Development Report 2023*, David Malpass confesses that migration-related issues are becoming even more widespread and urgent due to severe divergences between and within countries—in terms of real wages, labor market opportunities, demographic patterns, and climate costs (2023, p. xv). The World Bank published an estimation of 148 million people who are not living in their countries of birth. This estimation showcases the importance of migration today. As a matter of fact, when we consider environmental crises like the last Turkey-Syria earthquake in February 2023 and conflict in South Sudan and Ukraine, people are obliged to leave their homesteads in order to find rest elsewhere. Even though in "Does Climate Change Cause Migration?", Ilan Kelman (2020) challenges the belief that climate change constitutes the main factor of people migrating today, we have to acknowledge that climate change has a great impact on people and

causes the victims to move. Again, climate impacts—such as increased flooding and drought, stronger storms, and sea level rise—are already displacing millions (Francis, 2019, p. 123). Furthermore, in "Urban-Rural Gaps in the Developing World: Does Internal Migration Offer Opportunities?", David Lagakos (2020) claims that the urban-rural gaps are also sources of inequality and then oblige a large number of people to leave their home. Besides, Sarah Wolff highlights that migration is a phenomenon that has accelerated with the expansion of globalization and subsequent rising social inequalities, the acceleration of climate change, and the desire to get better jobs and to support family members staying at home (Wolff, 2021, p. 5). This article examines migrants' motivations that drive them out of their homes. I mainly focus on the reading of Imbolo M'Bue's *Behold the Dreamers* which offers us the story of the Jende and Neni Jonga who with their utopic view of the United States, find themselves in the quicksand of deferred hope. In the process of the analysis, I deploy the Freudian critical theory to uncover the internal realities of the migrants. For "The notion that human beings are motivated, even driven, by desires, fears, needs, and conflicts of which they are unaware—that is, unconscious" (Tyson, 2006, p. 12). This essay is structured around two main axes. The first section discusses the various motives of the migrating Jongas. And the last section investigates the dire situation of the Jongas in the landing spot. Now, it is commonly believed that every action is the outward manifestation of an inner incentive. Let us see, therefore, the motives of the Jongas' migrating.

Reasons for the Jongas' Move to America: First, being desperate for their future and one of their children, the Jongas move in search of a rosy and guaranteed future. Most individuals in life are so concerned with their destinies. Being the most important part of human life, destiny is strictly and earnestly dealt with. No one likes a gloomy future full of pains and struggles. Despite the hustles and bustles of life, individuals seek to fight for a better future. Let us examine what the narrator means in *Behold the Dreamers* when asked: "Who traveled to America only to return to a future of nothingness in Cameroon?" (2016, p. 19) This rhetorical question suggests that the Jongas are fleeing from the future of nothingness in Cameroon. In fact, America promises a rosy future to everyone living on its soil. This fact is deduced from the ideology of freedom that was preached through the founding documents of the nation and constitutes the backdrop of most persons who migrated to the United States. The protagonist of Mbue's debut novel, Jende clearly mentions that as an answer to his employer, Mr. Clark Edwards' question "Why did you come to America if your town is so beautiful?" To this question, the African immigrant replies that in America, "I can become something. I can even become a respectable man. My son can become a respectable man" (p. 39). This implies that though his hometown is beautiful, he can never become something there. For the rareness of the challenges and the opportunities that can foster his abilities to achieve more perfectly wonderful life in future and even for his son. I have to recall here that Jende is ideally caricatured as a patriot in the sense that he never forgets his beautiful town.

The pursuit of a peachy future is also blatant when Mbue alludes to the biblical quotation as the epigraph to describe America as considered by most of the poor Cameroonians. Actually, she quotes a biblical statement to set the envisioned setting of her novel:

For the Lord God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of hills. (Deuteronomy 8: 7-9)

This epigraph is the story of the promise of God to the Israelites after being freed from Egypt, the land of servitude. This tasteful description concerns the Promised Land in which the destinies of the people will be opulently full of good things. Written as a peephole into the world of the African immigrants in America, the novel shows that the immigrants view America as the Promised Land where they will stumble into the expectedly accomplished lives.

Second, the family pursues a better life which they are unable to get in their homeland. Actually, *Behold the Dreamers'* immigrants are triggered by the desire for better life. This corroborates the belief of the psychoanalysis theorists who think of a human being's desire as the motive of his/her actions. In fact, Jende says: "I thank God, and I believe I work hard, and one day I will have a good life here. My parents, they, too, will have a good life in Cameroon" (Mbue, p. 46). In fact, Jende's strong desire of a better life for himself and his family prompts him to America where he thinks that he will find that life since his homeland could provide him any. Moreover, it is said of him: "He would have to return to a country where visions of a better life were the birthright of a blessed few, to a town from which dreamers like him were fleeing daily" (p. 60). This quote describes the homeland of the character as a land where better life is restricted. And this was what quickens him to move to the Promised Land.

Third, the lack of better job opportunities at home prompted their decision to go to America where they could get promising opportunities. According to Koser, job opportunities become therefore scarce in poor countries, and individuals "are prepared to take the risk of leaving their homes in order to create new opportunities for themselves and their children" (Koser, p. 10). Koser further believes that there are far more unemployed or underemployed people in the poor world than jobs for them in the segmented labor markets of the rich economies (p. 39). Though most people do not

want to move away from their family, friends, and familiar cultures (p. 40), many of them cannot help but leave for the sake of their survival.

In *Behold the Dreamers* for instance, the central characters Jende and Neni Jonga are exposed to underemployment in Limbe. With his low education, Jende has to struggle with the low-paying job of cleaning the streets of the city and other trifling jobs. They have few opportunities for professional success. Cameroon as well as other developing nations always offers little opportunities to the young generation as a whole. Again, this challenge regularly opens up young as well as educated people to a phenomenon under the name of Brain Drain. As a consequence, "Inadequate remuneration, bad working conditions, lack of professional development opportunities, lack of security, and lack of funding are important factors in their decision to leave" (Brock and Blake, p. 12). Under such circumstances, it is rational for most reasoning persons to go after better opportunities elsewhere. Most of the time, the appropriate destination is the developed countries for they "appear to offer better pay and working conditions, or career and training opportunities that are not available in developing countries" (p. 12). That is probably the reason why skilled people are liable to move out of their places of birth.

Little opportunities and challenges plainly certify Jende's flight from Cameroon to America, his land of the so-called future. To the question related to the job he had back home, Jende explains: "any job is a good job in Cameroon, Mr. Edwards. Just to have somewhere that you can wake up in the morning and go to is a good thing. But what about the future? That is the problem, sir. I could not even marry my wife" (Mbue, p. 43). Jende's worry about his future is proof that the conditions under which he was working in Limbe are precarious. He strengthens his decision to move when he says: "my country is no good [...] I stay in my country, I would have become nothing. I would have remained nothing. My son will grow up and be poor like me, just like I was poor like my father" (p. 39). Interestingly, I think that Jende's plight epitomizes the hardships that young people collide within Africa. And this is what fuels the very high rate of people like Jende to immigrate to other promising places.

Fourth, it is always difficult for people to stand poverty and starvation without any reaction. In reality, it is because the Jongas are victims of poverty and starvation that they make up their minds to get out of Limbe. First and foremost, Mbue with her ironic strategy begins her story by painting Jende's sophisticated résumé to apply for job in America, his place of grand achievements. The reading of the résumé itself unveils his poor status. In fact, the volunteer career counselor helped him craft it:

to suggest (italics mine) he was a man of grand accomplishments: farmer responsible for tilling land and growing healthy crops; street cleaner responsible for making sure the town of Limbe looked beautiful and pristine; dishwasher in Manhattan restaurant, in charge of ensuring patrons ate from clean and germ-free plates; livery cabdriver in the Bronx, responsible for taking passengers safely from place to place. (p. 1)

I do not in any case believe that a person with a rich background could have such a résumé. I think Mbue satirizes her protagonist by presenting this work history as "grand accomplishments". Really, Jende's work history reveals that he has a poor background which he wants to break out. Furthermore, it is written about Jende: "Not young men like him, not people facing a future of poverty and despondency in their own country. They got there (America) and stayed there until they could return home as conquerors ... with pockets full of dollars and photos of a happy life" (p. 19). Moreover, Fatou's words to Neni, when she has already spent one and a half year in America, encompass the fact that the poor couple is looking for achievement: "Lemme tell you something. When you in America *vingt-quatre ans* (italics in the original), and you still poor..." (p. 11). This authenticates my view that these immigrants were poor before going to America for success. Finally, Mbue purposely uses the character of Cindy – the white woman – to reveal the truth about Africa: "Being

poor for you in Africa is fine. Most of you are poor over there. The shame of it, it's not as bad for you" (p. 123). From my African perspective, I think Jende and Neni moved with the purpose of fighting poverty which besieged them in Limbe. All being considered, it is obvious that migrants move from poverty to areas where they could become rich in some way. And again, poverty always exposes people to hunger and starvation. In his celebrated book *Poverty and Famines*, Amartya Sen holds that there is an interconnection between poverty and famine or starvation. Therefore, a nation or location wherein there is a large rate of poverty, people will probably become victims of starvation or famine which may lead to death unless there is a solution found. Sen defines starvation as "the wider sense of people going without adequate food" (p. 40). Imbolo Mbue singles this fact out in her debut novel by shaping her character in a way that reveals the problem of scarcity of food in Cameroon. First and foremost, she makes Jende confess: "Cameroon has nothing" (p. 40). This implies that there is no food problem in this African country according to him since the country has nothing for its population. In addition, food scarcity in Cameroon leads people to malnutrition. This is what Jende means when he says: "People in this country [talking about America], always worrying about how to eat, they pay someone good money to tell them: Eat this, don't eat that. If you don't know how to eat, what else can you know how to do in this world?" (p. 28). For Jende, America is the only place where people care about how to eat and not what to eat. And mostly, African people do not care for their diet because of the rarity of food. This being considered, I think Jende and his wife struggle to move to the country of dreams where they will be able to find adequate nourishment because back home in Limbe they are deprived of food. Thus, they are victims of starvation which is the engine behind their mobility.

Finally, the Jongas are deprived of happiness at home. Of course, everyone wants to be happy but in case you are heavily weighed by the problems, the only solution is to find a way of escape. The migrants in this novel want to escape bitterness to pursue happiness in America which promises happiness. In fact, *Behold the Dreamers* centers happiness as the driving stamina behind Jende and Neni Jonga. Being shackled down in their homeland – Limbe by dysphoria, the two characters especially Jende works in between three jobs in order to go for the land of Happiness. For most people in the world, especially in Africa, America harbors happiness and this can be extended to whosoever may dream of it. This belief is strongly engrained in *The Declaration of Independence* where the founding fathers held that every individual has a God-given right to pursue happiness. In *World Happiness Report 2018*, Helliwell et al. asserted that most of the migrants seek happier life that they could not enjoy in their local residences. The Jongas are in search of blessedness that is unfindable in Limbe. It is related of Neni that "America, to her, was synonymous with happiness" (p. 312). This means that if they had not been after gleefulness they would not have moved to America. Besides, when Neni was on board for the happy land, she took "a panoramic mental picture of them [neighbors who came for her farewell] ... wishing them the same happiness she knew she was going to find in America ... a place with all the pleasures she desired" (Mbue, p. 13). This powerful yearning for gladness is certified when she first landed. It is further written of her: "These days she sang more than she had in her entire life" (p. 31). Considering her singing, I believe that Neni's view of America targets happiness that she could not enjoy once in her hometown. Happiness is sometimes revealed through singing. Moreover, the discussion between Jende and his boss Mr. Clark connotes the belief that there is happiness in America: "'And you think America has something for you?' 'Ah, yes, sir, very much, sir!' he said, his voice escalating once more. 'America has something for everyone, sir....'" (p. 40) The implication of their conversation brings to the point that America is the only milieu where all people can be gleeful and enjoy their happiness. At the end of the day, it may be said that migrants in some way or another get out of their native lands in search of joyful life. To achieve this, they need to combat poverty which is the source of their unhappiness. Combatting poor living conditions at home is the foundation for their will to go abroad. Nevertheless, despite their efforts to keep up with the realities of the landing spot, the migrants find themselves in an undesirable and frightening society.

Falling into Dystopia: In their move to the land of success, the Jongas have never thought of the reality of American society. The American belief that anyone can succeed if only they are willing to work hard appears illusory in the description of Mbue. The excitement of this family about the Promised Land decreases as soon as they land. This is due to the various complications they daily witness. They finally find themselves stranded in the complex society of America. First and foremost, Jende and Neni Jongas have difficulty fitting into the American Labor market. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, the labor market is "the supply of people in a particular country or area who are able and willing to work, especially in relation to the number of jobs that are available." This definition implies that the labor market concerns the supply and the demand of labor. Since most of the migrants are longing for work that will improve their living conditions, they get ready to embrace the American dream which sustains the idea that all individuals can achieve success with hard work. However, readers feel surprised to see that the labor markets in the two landing spots are saturated and this opens the migrants to the façade of the job markets. In fact, their otherness becomes more visible as soon as they get to the landing spot. This is probably the reason why they are restricted to low-paying jobs. In *Behold the Dreamers*, the immigrants do not enjoy the labor market in America. They are excluded because of their illegal status. Undocumented people always find difficulties in getting a good and paying job in America. The only jobs available for them, especially Jende are temporary and low-paying jobs. When the male protagonist landed, the first job he found was dishwashing in a Manhattan restaurant. After that, he worked as a livery cabdriver. And then he was fortunately recruited as Edwards' chauffeur. This job provided him with the minimum for survival in America. But as the Lehman Brothers – where Mr. Edwards works – collapsed, he lost this job and became unemployed. Finally, he became a dishwasher in two restaurants which complicated his last times in the foreign land. In short, he has no job security in the American labor market due to his outsidership.

To be evident, Neni has worked as a housekeeper and babysitter for the Edwardses (p. 114). Their happy moment in the journey was when Jende was hired by Clark Edwards. This is why Jende said to Neni: "These people are our bread and tea" (p. 110). This means that without this family they would not be able to stay in America. A survey of Jende and Neni's employment on American soil shows that they have not found permanent jobs that could guarantee them a promising future. In fact, America always limits immigrants like them to low-paying jobs to prevent them from getting the asylum application that will enable them to stay safely in America. Let us also consider this passage: "The asylum application was not approved, the lawyer told him. The case was being referred to an immigration judge. Jende would need to appear in court because the government was going to begin the removal proceedings against him" (p. 56). The passage illustrates the fact that America does not want immigrants in its labor market regardless of their hard work. Though the Jongas worked hard, their asylum application was not approved by the government. On the landing spot, migrants are often overexploited. Though the United States does have regulations to prevent labor trafficking, the current visa regulation – which requires visas to be tied to employers – not only makes it difficult for foreign workers to leave abusive employers but also creates a cycle of exploitation for employees on temporary work visas (Hermann, p.40). In *Behold the Dreamers*, the label of illegality exposes the Jongas to hardships in the labor market. Let us see what Mr. Clark Edwards said before recruiting Jende: "You are going to sign a confidentiality agreement that you'll never say anything about what you hear me say or see me do. Never. To anyone absolutely no one. Do you understand?" (pp. 8-9) I know that it is important for a chauffeur to be loyal to the boss. Yet, what worries me is that although Jende has been more than faithful to Clark and Cindy Edwards, Cindy has her husband fire Jende at the critical moment of deportation. This is the moment that he mostly needs money to support his family with their newborn baby and fight for his asylum, but he loses the job that allowed him to enjoy a bit of America. His real exploitation comes when he later finds a dishwashing job in the two restaurants. "With the two jobs, he worked mornings, afternoons, evenings. He worked

weekends, too. For six days of the week, he left before Liomi woke up and came back after he was in bed" (p. 257). This quotation proves how Jende is entrapped into inevitable exploitation. He works the whole day and week without being able to fight for his asylum application with the earned money.

The Jongas' trials in *Behold the Dreamers* culminated when Jende lost his job with the Edwardses and was obligated to work in two restaurants for the survival of the family. As a matter of fact, it is said of him: "For working all those hours, he got less than half of what he used to make working for Clark Edwards" (p. 257). This delineates that he earns a trifling wage for the work he is limited to. Had he earned good wages throughout his stay in America he would have been able to fight for his asylum's approval. America denies him paying jobs with the purpose of preventing him from getting his papers. In fact, "[w]ithout working papers [work permit], he would never be able to get any other job that paid as much" (p. 175). Again, America restricts him to circumvent him in low-paying jobs. In addition, there is always a problem of identity which often cripples migrants to poverty. The Jongas are labeled as illegal people who are to be combatted. The African identity that travels with them becomes a stigma in the United States. Admittedly, Jende comes to America as an undocumented person pursuing better living conditions that are not available back in Limbe. This status of undocumented migrants attracts legal cloud over him. Stevenson highlighted that the way "immigration is treated as criminal anomaly, the navigation of criminal labyrinth exacerbates the perception that undocumented populations are criminal threat" (Stevenson, p. 166). Worse, Michelle Alexander held in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that "In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So, we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color 'criminal' and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind" (p. 2). The Jongas share the same physical identity – skin color – with African Americans cannot escape this reality facing black people in America.

The double identities of these immigrants – blacks and immigrants – amps their plight up and they are put at the margins. This is why Jende could not get access to any promising job after he was fired by Mr. Edwards. Here is what Bubakar said concerning the American police: "The police is for the protection of white people, my brother. Maybe black women and black children sometimes, but not black men. Never black men. *Black men and police are palm oil and water* (italics mine)" (p. 74). The metaphor in this quotation demonstrates that black men in America are never guiltless in front of the police – they are adversaries. Jende, therefore, finds himself among criminal hunters. And since he shares the same skin-color, he is also guilty and must be ostracized. I believe that the ostracism of immigrants in America is legalized in the sense that the U.S. immigration policy plans deportation for the bread seeking people. Thus, as long as the immigrants do not belong to the group, they have to be ostracized from America and brought somewhere else, maybe their homeland. Let us take this passage into consideration: "A teenage girl choked up while telling Jende of a friend's father who was deported to Guatemala even though he knew no one there. Her friend was very sad now, the young woman said" (p. 366). This is how undocumented persons are mostly treated in America because of their being stigmatized "illegal people." They are in a word excluded from the American society because their identity does not meet the American needs. Enduring all the criminal-like treatments because of their different identities, the migrants will therefore witness accommodation and integration problems.

Let us consider the room which the Jongas rented when they reached the destination in *Behold the Dreamers*. The comparison made between the Edwardses' apartment and theirs is more speaking: "The Edwardses' apartment was big and beautiful, he said, millions of dollars more beautiful their sunless one-bedroom apartment" (p. 27). I think with this comparison one can assume that their apartment is so poor. Another instance that describes the misery of the apartment is when the Edwards' boys visited them.

As a matter of fact, the narrator says: "If the Edwards boys were fazed by the obvious signs of poverty in the apartment (the worn-out brown carpet; the retro TV sitting on the coffee table across from the sofa; the fan in the corner struggling to do the job of an AC; the fake flowers hanging on the wall and doing nothing to brighten the living room), they did not show it" (p. 163). To make matters worse, Neni prophetically says: "We won't live in this place full of cockroaches anymore" (p. 30). All these evidences reveal the precariousness of their dwelling place in America, the beautiful country. This contradicts the worldwide description of the United States. Furthermore, attitudes of racism and xenophobia are also notable problem of migrants in the host countries. This is manifested through facial expressions as portrayed in the novel. Neni Jonga in *Behold the Dreamers* could read that hatred in the eyes of a white young man at the Hudson Hotel where Winston – Jende's cousin – was celebrating his birthday. Actually, "She pushed through the crowd, [...], and inadvertently hit a young man's drink with her elbow. The drink did not spill, but the young man gave her a look that she was certain meant: What the hell are you doing here, you stupid African woman?" (p. 94) Furthermore, she says to her husband:

"What about what we did for them!" she said, grabbing the paper bag and standing up. "Were we not good to them, too? Why is it that they and their problems are more important than us and our problems? I kept her secret, and what does she do for me? She has her husband fire you!" You don't know that! You don't know women like her, Jende. You don't know how they think they're better than people like us. How they think they can do anything they want to people like us." (p. 271)

To me, Clark and Cindy Edwards represent the mainstream Americans whereas Jende and Neni, are the African immigrants. Through the abovementioned quotation, it is clear that most white folks do not treat immigrants well, especially Africans as their equals. This is the evidence of the ordeals and agonies that most migrants go through in the host societies. In fact, migrants portrayed in the novel can be qualified as modern-day slaves due to the abuse and exploitation. I must admit that the conception of slavery is not plainly depicted in *Behold the Dreamers*. However, the novel shows how America enslaves most immigrants, especially Africans. The United States of America self-professes to be the role model of the world just as it all started with John Winthrop who reinvigorated this belief by saying: "...for we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill, the eyes of people [shall be] upon us" (qtd. in Lowman, p. 30). In Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" engraved in the Statue of Liberty, the Mother of Exiles invited the desperate people:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free [...]
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"* (qtd. in Ragsdale, p. 167)

As Ragsdale comments, the statue symbolizes "the beginning of a new life for millions of immigrants fleeing poverty and hardship" (p. 167). Despite this boastful invitation, America oftentimes interweaves the helpless immigrants with more pain. Mbue's Jende embodies the exploitation reserved for immigrants in the United States of America. When he was enticed to America, he excitedly proclaimed: "Everyone wants to come to America, sir. Everyone. To be in this country, sir. To live in this country. Ah! It is the greatest thing in the world" (p. 39). He added in the same line that "America has something for everyone" (p. 40). All these show that he falls into the trap of the American self-professed freedom and prosperity. Surprisingly, at his arrival, he is opened to the entangling problem of papers and asylum-seeking. The first question put to him during his first interview reveals that reality: "And what kind of papers do you have in this country?" (p. 6) In my opinion, this sounds paradoxical to the American self-preached freedom and prosperity. Another fact is that throughout his stay in America, he could not get a sound job that would help him enjoy his new life. He is luckily recruited as Edwards' chauffeur and becomes a slave to the whole family. In the point of fact, he avows: "I work as a servant to people, driving them all over, the whole day, sometimes the whole week, answering yes sir,

yes madam, bowing even to a little child” (p. 230). This means that he is subdued to servitude while working for the Edwardses just like many other migrants all over the world. Jende’s thralldom in America worsens when he loses that job and becomes a dish cleaner in two restaurants. He works restlessly days and nights because he only has “a mere fifteen minutes here and there to sit and rest his hands or have a free meal from the kitchen” (p. 258). What complicated his ordeal is that this whole bunch of undertaken works does not provide him with his pretentious economic freedom. I think that this life does not differ from what some of the former African slaves went through with the slaveholders. My reading of *Behold the Dreamers* with a psychoanalytic lens shows how the immigrant couple underwent behavioral changes throughout their stay in the United States. Life in America has altered them and that nearly led to divorce. Jende Jonga being “stuck in an immigration purgatory” (p. 87), has his lovely marital attitude changed because of the internalization of the pains and struggles of the American immigration which becomes his frustration. Afterward, he projected the frustration inflicted on him to his wife with whom he started behaving the way he had never done before. To better illustrate that, let us consider the following two passages:

because he hadn’t been the same man since the day the letter for the deportation hearing arrived. The weight of the letter was crushing him, she could see; he was now a man permanently at the edge of his breaking point ... The husband who seldom uttered words like “stupid” and “idiot” was now throwing those words left and right, in moments of rage and frustration ... It was as if the letter of his court appointment had turned him from a happy living man to an outraged dying man intent on showing the world his anger at his impending death. (p. 235)

The man who has promised to always take care of her was standing above her vomiting a parade of insults, spewing out venom she never thought he had inside him. For the first time in a long love affair, she was afraid he would beat her. She was almost certain he would beat her. And if he had, she would have known that it was not her Jende who was beating her but a grotesque being created by the sufferings of an American immigrant life. (p. 236)

These two quotations demonstrate how Jende, the good husband, has been dehumanized because of the dream of living in America where there are greener pastures. His internalized wrath was kindled against his helpless family. This is what Freud and his theorists call displacement which is “‘taking it out’ on someone or something less threatening than the person who caused our fear, hurt, frustration, or anger” (Tyson, p. 15). Likewise, Neni is influenced by the hard times of her husband. She becomes the product of her predicaments in America. In chapter forty-one, she blackmails Cindy Edwards who has been favorable to them in their early life in America. In fact, Cindy opened herself up to her and gave her housework and babysitting. Nevertheless, Neni uses the picture she took of Cindy when she was heavily drunk as a threat to get ten thousand dollars. This is therefore the result of how immigration has transformed her. Even Jende is amazed at his changed wife when he says: “I didn’t know what kind of woman I married till this night” (p. 273). The character of Neni Jonga can be compared to Ma Joad. Both are radically metamorphosed by the hell of migration. Since migrants in both novels have gone through metamorphosis under the influence of hardships, my worry is how they could accomplish or preserve their destinies. As a final point, *Behold the Dreamers* depicts its characters with injured destinies in America. Jende and Neni become disheartened because of whatever they experienced from the American immigration. Their future is endangered once they get to the Promised Land. One blatant example is: “Jende went to bed that night bitter in spite of Neni’s apologies, angry at her for recklessly exposing their child to harmful untruths and angrier at himself for all the failures (italics mine) of his life” (p. 129). In this quotation, Jende is angry because he senses that his life fails in the beautiful America. So, he cannot achieve his glamorous destiny in this part of the world. Another factual example is when it is said of Neni: “The helplessness crushed her, the fact that she had traveled to America only to be

reminded of how powerless she was, how unfair life could be” (p. 63). This shows that Neni could not fulfill her destiny because of her helplessness and powerlessness in the great America. From the Joads down to the Jongas, I believe from this analysis that they are shut from achieving their goals in the host societies. Hence, they finally realized that America has no rosy future for them nor their children. Inevitably, from being hopeful migrants from their home because of their utopian conception of the landing spot, the Jongas become disillusioned due to their experience of the dystopian reality in the receiving country.

CONCLUSION

Every human being can be subjected to migration because movement determines human life. David Bacon’s quote which opens this debate is quite relevant in the sense that we all necessarily need to move in life. Even if there is a need to come back to the initial residence after some period, we must note that migration is an obligation and not a choice. That is the reason why there are many types of migration – rural exodus, immigration, emigration, brain drain, and exile. Believe it or not, you may find yourself in one of these types of migration. However, we need to stop and analyze the situations around us. No one wants to permanently live in cruel poverty leading to hunger, diseases, and finally death, and even in a place completely turned apart by some environmental crisis. As I pointed out in this study, you witness Mbue’s portrayal of a Cameroonian family on their flight to America. As revealed, they move to get access to a better life, a rosy and promising future, happiness, and self-fulfillment. Nevertheless, as demonstrated their various dreams have been shattered in the landing spot. According to the pitchy description of America in the media and many other advertising methods, the poor and futureless people chose America as their last resort. Not knowing that this so-called rich and powerful country has its surprises for whoever steps into the land. Instead of finding themselves in such a unique success, the Jongas get themselves into a dystopia. In fact, their utopia has suddenly turned to be a dystopia where life and hope are trapped in the quicksand of adversity. Therefore, one thing we should all bear in mind is that there is always a problem in every location. Problems might differ depending on location but this does not mean that there is a place out there without issues affecting the dwellers. Now, the intention is not to decry migration. Instead, I want to believe in the importance of migration. Yet, we need to carefully study the landing spots to avoid dire situations. And today, migrating illegally means swimming in an ocean of pain, desperation, and death. Consequently, before moving, it is often wise to be legally secured. This means the potential migrant needs to have access to all the papers required by the host country. Also, they need to work on building their own capacity in order to withstand any situation that might come their way.

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