

FICTIONALIZING THEORY, THEORIZING FICTION: THE STYLISTICS OF RETURN MIGRATION IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a stylistic investigation of *Americanah* (2013) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's latest novel. Whereas *Americanah* is the melting pot where love and romance collide and comeingle with hair politics and the shifting meanings of skin color, Adichie employs migration as the window through which these issues are projected. Beyond Adichie's juxtaposition of binary migratory terms of "Americanah" and "American" and her protagonist's choice of the former, the novelist's preoccupation is to critically engage international migration theories, and to chart a new migration story, where return migration is the quintessential closure.

INTRODUCTION

Americanah, the latest novel from the award-winning writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a melting point for different subject matters like race, skin color and identity, love and romance and hair politics. Rather than take each of these issues as singular and distinct entities, Adichie conceives of them as the combinatorial complexity that define the ordinary day-to-day experience in migratory life. Adichie thus employs migration as the window through which these different issues that intertwine at the heart of the text are presented to the

reader. Invariably, therefore, *Americanah* can be described as a valid literary statement on migration and dislocation.

The theoretical boundaries and innovations bridged by *Americanah* suggest the text belongs in the class of literary works identifiable as “fictionalized theory” and “theorized fiction” (Usman 2012:249). While many of the migratory experiences in the novel work within migration theory, Adichie simultaneously interrogate and transcend the borders of international migration theories by introducing a new factor that both influences migration and projects a new perspective on return migration. According to Dustmann and Weiss (2007:237), lack of economic opportunity and escape from natural disaster/persecution are two main reasons individuals migrate throughout history. While identifying the need to flee “choicelessness” as the main reason for much of the migration in the twenty-first century Nigerian setting of the novel, Adichie uses literary dimensions to shake up the foundations of theory. Consequently, the direction of this type of migration, how it affects the bonds of love, how it changes personalities and cultural views, and how it reinterprets identity become the novelist’s major theoretical engagements. In addition, Adichie is concerned with how migration debases and elevates, how it barter and fulfills and, most significantly, how it reinvents.

Americanah centers on two young lovers, Ifemelu and Obinze, who migrate to the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively not because of the familiar stories of fleeing from natural disaster, war or poverty, but because they are running away from what Adichie terms the “lethargy of choicelessness” in the novel (p. 276). Both Ifemelu and Obinze belong to the Nigerian (upper) middle class where the need to migrate is not induced by poverty but by the quest to experience choice and something new somewhere else. This battle against choicelessness is clearly projected to the reader through Obinze’s mind while attending a dinner in a friend’s house, during his short stay in Britain. When Alexa, one of

the guests, commends Blunkett's intention to make Britain continue to be a refuge to survivors of frightful wars, Obinze agrees with her, yet feels alienated because his own migration story is different from those common ones motivated by wars and woes:

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. 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...none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty (p.276).

From this perspective, the need to flee choicelessness defines *Americanah* as a new kind of migration story and sets the text in motion against recognized migration theories.

The newness of the path of *Americanah* as a migration story becomes even more conspicuous in the decision of Ifemelu to return to Nigeria after spending thirteen years in the United States not because she is a failure, but out of a strong desire to return home. With Ifemelu's deliberate return migration to Nigeria, her homeland, she chooses to be identified as an Americanah rather than as an American. For many migrants, the term "American" indicates the privileged possession of the nationality of that enormous world power nation that many immigrants are desperate to acquire, while Americanah defines an identity based on previous experience of living in America.

No valid statement can be made on *Americanah* without deconstructing the term "Americanah" which, more or less, reveals the thesis of the narrative as well as the preoccupation of Adichie in the text. In Nigerian parlance, the term "Americanah" is an identity term that is premised on a person's previous experience of living in America. In an

interview, Adichie defines *Americanah* as a Nigerian word that can describe any of those who have been to the US and return American affectations; pretend not to understand their mother tongues any longer; refuse to eat Nigerian food or make constant reference to their life in America (see <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=195598496>).

From this understanding, it is clear that Ifemelu's decision to return home without worrying about being identified as an "Americanah", establishes the fact that Adichie is proposing and charting a path for a new kind of migration story whose quintessence is return migration.

THEORETICS OF RETURN MIGRATIONS IN *AMERICANAH*

According to Dustmann and Weiss (2007), return migration is "a situation where migrants return to their country of origin by their own choice, often after a significant period abroad" (p.23). Since willingness to return is essential in defining return migration, theories of return migration emphasize the connection between the compelling reason for both the migration and the return (Dumont and Spielvogel 2008:178; Ghosh 2000:185). The fact that the two major migrants in *Americanah* migrate as a result of choicelessness—a reason/term which ordinarily challenges international migration theories—indicates that the nature of return migration in the text is equally going to be challenging.

The first return migration experience that Adichie projects in the novel is the forced type. This type of return migration is not alien in migration stories, and explains why Dumont and Spielvogel (2008) argue that "The bulk of the return migration flow is voluntary. Yet 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). The literary dimension that transforms forced removal into a voluntary one is what Adichie uses to challenge theory.

Following his university education in Nigeria, Obinze migrates to Britain but has to live invisibly there for about two years after having overstayed his tourist visa. His last hope of obtaining the required immigration papers through a sham marriage is, however, foiled minutes before the commencement of the marriage ceremony. Arrested, Obinze has to pass through the rigors of being transferred from one detention center to another before his eventual deportation to Nigeria.

The literary interventions Adichie makes to change this forced return migration into a voluntary one are visible from two aesthetic planes. First, when the immigration officer in Obinze's first detention center arranges a lawyer to meet with him, Obinze plainly tells the lawyer that he is not ready to pursue any legal battle as he is willing to return to Nigeria:

“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, with the air of a man who had said those same words, in that same tone, more times than he wished to, or could, remember. “I’m willing to go back to Nigeria,” Obinze said. The last shard of his dignity was like a wrapper slipping off that he was desperate to retire. The lawyer looked surprised. “Okay then,” he said, and got up a little too hastily, as though grateful that his job had been made easier (p. 279)

Obinze's willingness to return to Nigeria surprises the lawyer who has come with the usual air of superiority that he puts up in such situations. In spite of that pitiable and reproachable condition, Obinze is however desperate to “retire” the “last shard of his dignity” that is slipping off like a wrapper. Obinze's resolve to hold on to the last vestiges of dignity that a

two-year invisible existence in Britain and the imminent debasing detention experience leave him, translates Obinze's return migration from a forced one to a voluntary one.

From this point of view, it is obvious that Adichie recognizes the theoretical dimensions in migration studies which subject illegal migrants to eventual forced removals. However, the novelist widens the borders of migration theories to provide a literary intervention which proposes that when such forced return migrations are imminent, the returning migrant, as a sense of personal duty and dignity, must be ready to change her/his status from a removed migrant into a voluntarily returning migrant. Only such resolve can sustain the returning migrant through the challenging processes of returning and the realities of having returned.

In his review of return migration theories, Cassarino (2004) submits that resource mobilization and preparedness are two key factors that define return migration. In his definition, Cassarino argues that "Preparedness pertains not only to the willingness of migrants to return home, but also to their readiness to return. In other words, 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" (p. 271). With Obinze's willingness to return to Nigeria, Adichie thus interrogates migration theory by building Obinze's voluntary return migration on the singularity of willingness without considering other factors such as resource mobilization and readiness.

The other aesthetic plane that translates Obinze's forced removal into a voluntary return migration is evident when Adichie places Obinze in the company of other Nigerians scheduled to be forcefully removed from Britain. When Obinze gets to the new detention center in Dover, his Nigerian cellmate tells him that he will not allow himself to be deported:

“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)

The confidence with which Obinze’s cellmate discloses his plan to refuse being removed is enticing and tempting for anyone who is not resolved to voluntarily return. The fact that Obinze’s cellmate is not one of those eventually deported alongside Obinze indicates that he succeeds with his machination. Rather than praise this cellmate for his crafty ingenuity, Adichie juxtaposes him with Obinze in order to assert that the only honorable option in the ugly situation of a forced return migration, is to allow the forced removal to metamorphose into a voluntary one instead of putting on the pretentious air of someone who is mentally deranged. On this ground, Obinze chooses the more dignifying option: changing a forced return migration into a voluntary decision to return home.

On the return flight to Nigeria, Adichie further places Obinze side-by-side with another forced return migrant in order to emphasize the literary dimension she is proposing in situations of forced return migration. From Obinze’s perspective, one sees the undefeated manner of the woman sitting next to him on the flight. Obinze’s observation leads to his conclusion that the woman will definitely get another passport with another name and try again (p. 283). Obinze realizes that the new light of the day dawning on him in Nigeria projects him as a failure of a kind and colors his coming days with gloom.

Outside, it was like breathing steam; he felt light-headed. A new sadness blanketed him, the sadness of his coming days, when he would feel the world slightly off-kilter, his vision unfocused (p. 284).

Nonetheless, he is undaunted in his resolve to willingly return to and stay in Nigeria. With this element of unbowed resistance to imposed marginality and discredit-ability, Adichie prescribes willingness and volition as the elixir in a forced return migration.

A voluntary or well-planned return migration is the other type of return migration projected by Adichie in *Americanah*. As earlier indicated, theories of return migration indicate that reasons motivating return migration are almost always related to the reasons that initially encourage the migration. Cerase (cited in Cassarino 2004:257-58) identifies four different types of return: return of failure; return of conservatism; return of retirement and return of innovation. Cerase's categories are not different from Dumont and Spielvogel's (2008):

We may distinguish essentially between four types of arguments, founded respectively on: *i*) failure to integrate into the host country and changes in the economic situation of the home country, *ii*) individuals' preferences for their home country; *iii*) the achievement of a savings objective, or *iv*) greater employment opportunities for individuals in their home country, thanks to experience gained abroad (p. 178).

What makes Ifemelu's voluntary return migration transcend the borders of return migration theories is the fact that her migration, like Obinze's, is motivated by the need to flee "choicelessness." In view of this fact, none of the reasons for return identified in return migration theories matches Ifemelu's return decision. Unlike Obinze, Ifemelu secures a scholarship that gives her legal entrance into the United States. During her thirteen-year sojourn in the US, she is able to complete her college study, work with her college certificate, undertake a fellowship in Princeton and successfully run a race blog with teaming followers

and great financial benefits. Given this profile, Ifemelu stands as an accomplished migrant woman, who is not constrained to undertake a permanent return migration home, especially since conditions at home, both in terms of infrastructure and economy, are poorer in comparison with those of the host country. In spite of her successes, Ifemelu finally returns to Nigeria, motivated by no other reason than the need to go back home:

It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness. 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 dull ache of loss, as though they had prised open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became 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. 6).

...there was no cause; it was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her (p. 7).

Since Ifemelu's return is based on no convincing reason, she first of all must deal with her personal struggles in order to convince herself of the rightness of her decision to return to Nigeria. She needs be convinced of that major decision being the right one in spite of so

many other perks: the success of her blog, the wealth the blog has brought, the money she generates from speaking engagements, the condo she owns, a Princeton fellowship and her promising romantic relationship with Blaine, an African-American. Consequently, she begins to seek auguries and signs that will indicate that her decision is a right one. For example, during her braiding session at the hair salon in Trenton, Ifemelu enthusiastically agrees with one of the stylists' submission that Nigerian films are good basically because she detects an augury in the statement: since Nigerian films are good, her decision to move back home is equally good. Her encounter with an unusually fat woman in miniskirt on the Trenton platform is another indication to Ifemelu that her decision to return to Nigeria is not just a right one, it is a valiant one:

She thought nothing of slender legs shown off in miniskirts—it was safe and easy, after all, to display legs of which the world approved—but the fat woman's act was about the quiet conviction that one shared only with oneself, a sense of rightness that others failed to see. Her decision to move back was similar; whenever she felt besieged by doubts, she would think of herself as standing valiantly alone, as almost heroic, so as to squash her uncertainty (p. 8)

In Adichie's perspective, Ifemelu's decision is an entirely heroic one, especially because almost everyone around her fails to see rationality in her resolution to return to Nigeria. No doubt, the lack of support from family and friends contributes largely to her uncertainty:

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.

“You are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn’t pay well,” Aunt Uju has said and then repeated herself, as though to make Ifemelu see the gravity of her own foolishness (p. 13-4).

In this circumstance, home becomes a site of struggle for Ifemelu. Home as a site of struggle is fueled by the fact that Ifemelu regards America as her home, having learnt to be at home in America and having secured American citizenship. The question of whether she will be able to cope in Nigeria thus becomes a relevant and rational one. In spite of the fact that her diaspora home is more beautiful and promising than her origin home, Ifemelu still chooses to go back to Nigeria and she returns to stay. With this dimension in Ifemelu’s migration story, Adichie makes a literary intervention to migration theory by postulating a return to the origin home as the closure of every migration, not caring whether or not the diaspora home gives superior access to various socio-economic advantages to the migrant than origin home.

THE HOME OUT OF TOUCH: ON THE CHALLENGES OF RETURNING AND REINTEGRATION

Although Adichie introduces literary interventions into the boundaries of migration theory, her depiction of the challenges encountered by Obinze and Ifemelu after their return journeys conform significantly with the challenges that return migration theories believe returnees are bound to encounter in the homeland. For Obinze, the challenges facing him back home, as a failed migrant, are indeed enormous. From the societal perspective, he is the

black sheep that must be isolated so as not to taint the image of the entire community. He will experience his first societal hostility and disapproval, even before he disembarks from the plane that conveys him and other deported Nigerians home:

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.” *Her face tight with disgust, as though they were all criminals bringing shame on upright Nigerians like her* (p. 283) (emphasis added)

At his own personal level, Obinze cannot stop the shame of his deportation from depleting his ego and sense of self-worth. On this ground, he stays indoors throughout the first week he spends in Nigeria after his deportation “reeling from what had happened to him in England, still insulated in layers of his own self-pity” (p. 23). However, Nneoma, his cousin, challenges him to handle the issue of his deportation lightly and make an attempt to reintegrate in order to chart a clear path for a successful future:

“Ahn ahn! O *gini*? Are you the first person to have this problem?

You have to get up and hustle. Everybody is hustling, Lagos is about hustling,” Nneoma said (p. 23)

At first, Obinze is irritated by Nneoma’s advice, believing that she is a rustic girl from the village who looks at the world with stark eyes and as a result, is ignorant of, and insensitive to, his kind of psychological plight. Soon, however, Obinze realizes that Nneoma is right:

...slowly, he realized she was right; he was not the first and he would not be the last.

He began applying for jobs listed in newspaper, but nobody called him for an interview, and his friends from school, who were working at banks and mobile phone companies, began to avoid him, worried that he would thrust yet another CV into their hands

The challenges which Obinze will have to endure at home in his efforts at securing employment, the hostility of the society to him as a failed migrant and his friends' avoidance pictures the home as not feeling entirely like home. Nonetheless, his determination to hustle for success gives him the elastic perseverance that paves the way for his eventual success.

Ifemelu whose own return is voluntary is equally challenged. The years spent in the United States have made the home totally strange and unattractive to Ifemelu. Consequently, Adichie unambiguously depicts how the home can become a site of struggle and home could be detestable, especially when the origin home is less developed than the diaspora home. Consequently, the two concepts: 'being-at-home' and 'being-home' are rendered problematic. This conflict at the heart of the home are understandable because, within migration theories, "it is the 'real' home, the very space from which one imagines oneself to have originated, and in which one projects the self as both belonging and original, that is the most unfamiliar: it is here that one is a guest, relying on the hospitality of others. It is this home which, in the end, becomes Home through the very *failure* of memory..." (Ahmed 1999: 330).

When Aisha, Ifemelu's hair stylist in Trenton, asks her whether she can stay in Nigeria, Ifemelu quickly recollects that when her aunt finally accepts that she is serious about returning to Nigeria, she (her aunt) also asks a similar question: "Will you be able to cope?" In the same way, her parents believe she may not be able to cope with Nigeria but are consoled by the fact that she can always return to America, since she is an American citizen.

The reality of the deplorable conditions of her homeland stare Ifemelu boldly in the face as soon as she takes her first ride through the city of Lagos:

“Ifemelu stared out of the window, half listening, thinking how unpretty Lagos was, roads infested with potholes, houses springing up unplanned like weeds. Of her jumble of feelings, she recognized only confusion” (p. 386).

A further description of Lagos life from Ifemelu’s view depicts the chaos and confusion determining daily life in that city:

...Lagos assaulted her; the sun-dazed haste, the yellow buses full of squashed limbs, the sweating hawkers racing after cars, the advertisements on hulking billboards... and the heaps of rubbish that rose on the roadsides like taunt. Commerce thrummed too defiantly. And the air was dense with exaggeration, conversations full of over-protestations. One morning, a man’s body lay on Awolowo Road. Another morning, The Island flooded and cars became gasping boats. Here, she felt, anything could happen, a ripe tomato could burst out of solid stone. And so she had the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence? (p. 385)

Apart from the conditions of the landscape, many aspects about her people including their fashions and passions, religious practices, spending habits, organizational and work ethics among other things, look very unfamiliar to Ifemelu. Thus, the details of her friend’s blusher

that is too red on her cheeks like bruises, and the green satin flowers in her hair that is askew; the importance and pride of having governors attend one's ceremony; the loud, discordant drone of too many generators whose sound pierced the soft middle of her ears and throbbed in her head assault Ifemelu's sense of decency. Other culture shocks include the monstrous ugly mansion which must be considered beautiful; the vapid magazines that profile interviews of boring rich women who have achieved nothing and have zilch to say coupled with the bombastic ways of speaking are some of the things that Ifemelu will have to learn and must learn quickly about her homeland. In light of her friends' romantic relationships that are based on financial and material gains, the disclosure by Doris that the women profiled in *Zoe*, the magazine she works for as a feature editor, usually pay Aunty Onenu, the magazine publisher, to be profiled, Ifemelu soon learns so many things including how to be bombastic: "I started feeling truly at home again when I started being bombastic!" (p. 430).

With W. Dumon's (1986) submission that "the returnee can be defined as a person who, in order to be reaccepted, has to readapt to the changed cultural and behavioural patterns of his community of origin and this is resocialization" (cited in Cassarino 2004: 259), Ifemelu is a returnee par excellence because she not only readjusts and readapts to the cultural and behavioral patterns of her homeland, she also makes this theoretical adjustment the theme of the first article in her Nigerian blog which focuses on Nigerpolitan Club, the society of Nigerians who recently returned from England and the US:

Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Lagos has always been undisputably itself, but would not know this at the meeting of the Nigerpolitan Club, a group of young returnees who gather every week to moan about the ways that Lagos is not like New York as though Lagos had ever been close to being like New

York. ...If your cook cannot make the perfect Panini, it is not because he is stupid. It is because Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich-eating people and his last oga did not eat bread in the afternoon. So he needs training and practice. And Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted, and *so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted* (p. 421) (emphasis added).

Though the article is composed rather sarcastically, it does not deny the fact that Adichie is making a theoretical assertion that indicates how different the Nigerian nation is from developed nations of the world, and how returning migrants must learn to admit and embrace this difference and readjust in order to first be accepted in the homeland, and also make themselves feel at home.

Within a short period, having become accustomed to how things work in her homeland, Ifemelu no longer sends text messages to her friend asking where to buy some specifics. At this juncture, she can truly think: "I'm really home. I'm home" (p. 411). The most important factor in Ifemelu's re-adaptation and readjustment for reintegration in her homeland is found two pages to the end of the text. By this time, Ifemelu is well-grounded as a Nigerian blogger writing on different subject matters that are peculiar to the Nigerian society and her sense of self-fulfillment and homeliness which indicates she is in Nigeria to stay become so evident: "she was at peace: to be at home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being" (p. 475).

THE TRIUMPH OVER “CHOICELESSNESS”

During his youthful days, Obinze is obsessed with America, thus; he reads a lot about and on America. The indication is that America, for Obinze, is that exciting place on the other side and it is his migration to America that will definitely make him secure victory over the “choicelessness” plaguing his life. Unfortunately, his desire to migrate to America will never be satisfied as the post-9/11 American immigration measures are tougher and practically insurmountable. In spite of his inability to migrate to America and his failed migration in Britain, Obinze is still able to triumph over “choicelessness.”

During his first meeting with Ifemelu upon her return to Nigeria, Obinze tells her in plain terms that the charm that America has over him in his youthful days no longer exists. As the discussion reveals, Obinze’s success over “choicelessness” is deeply ingrained in the wealth he has been able to accumulate in Nigeria over the years:

“What are you reading these days?” she asked. “I’m sure you’ve read every American novel ever published.”

“I’ve been reading a lot more of non-fiction, history and biographies. About everything, not just America.”

“What, you fell out of love?”

“I realized I could buy America, and it lost its shine. When all I had was my passion for America, they didn’t give me a visa, but with my new bank account, getting visa was very easy. I’ve visited a few times (p. 433-34).

With Obinze’s triumph over “choicelessness” by harnessing the business opportunities in Nigeria, Adichie seems to be making a subtle call to intending migrants plagued by

“choicelessness” and looking for something exciting somewhere else, to first look inwards within the homeland:

“...I met this guy the other day, and he was telling me how he started his satellite-dish business about twenty years ago. This was when satellite dishes were still new in the country and so he was bringing in something most people didn’t know about. He put his business plan together, and came up with a good price that would fetch him a good profit.

Another friend of his, who was already a businessman and was going to invest in the business, took a look at the price and asked him to double it. Otherwise, he said, the Nigerian wealthy would not buy. He doubled it and it worked.”

“Crazy,” she said. “Maybe it’s always been this way and we didn’t know because we couldn’t know. It’s as if we are looking at an adult Nigeria that we didn’t know about” (p. 429)

The fact that the said “businessman” started his booming business about twenty years before then, which most likely coincides with the peak of Obinze’s and Ifemelu’s passionate decision to subdue “choicelessness”, implicitly indicates that if the two had been patient enough to discover that there were exciting things around them, they would never have been plagued by “choicelessness.” After all, Obinze’s success is made possible by his stay in Nigeria.

On her own part, Ifemelu triumphs over “choicelessness” because she is now an American citizen. If any situation that is beyond her control arises, she can as well decide to

return to America, her diaspora home. The very first night that Ifemelu passes in Nigeria indicates this:

A painful throbbing had started behind her eyes and a mosquito was buzzing nearby and she felt suddenly, guiltily grateful that she had a blue American passport in her bag. It shielded her from choicelessness. She could always leave; she did not have to stay (p.390).

Although Ifemelu never thinks of returning again to America later in the text, the fact remains that her American citizenship has adequately protected her from choicelessness.

OF CLOSURE AND AMERICANAH SIGNIFICATION

As disclosed in the earlier part of this paper, understanding the significance of *Americanah* is highly crucial to the understanding of *Americanah* as a fictionalized theory and theorized fiction. In its very Nigerian context, *Americanah* is identification based on a previous living experience in America, which is self-revealing in the American accent of the individual. Thus, *Americanah* is an affinity without root or deep roots where American is the identity of rootedness in, and belongingness to, America. While the former is desirable, the latter is preferable and is the goal of most migrants in America. With Ifemelu's return to Nigeria, she privileges being called an *Americanah* over being referred to as an American. She is contented to be described in terms of her past experience of living in America. In this way, Adichie is literarily proposing a return migration for everyone in the diaspora, especially Nigerians.

In fact, Ifemelu will prefer to delineate her identity as an *Americanah* only in terms of her former experience of living in America, exclusive of an American accent. For this reason,

long before her decision to return to Nigeria, Ifemelu decides to stop speaking with an American accent in order to hold on to, affirm, and assert her identity as a Nigerian:

Ifemelu decided to stop faking American accent on a sunlit day. ... It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with “So”, and the sliding response of “Oh really”, but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds. And so she resolved to stop (p. 173).

Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? She had won: Cristina Tomas, pallid-faced Cristina Tomas under whose gaze she had shrunk like a small, defeated animal, would speak to her normally now. She had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers. And so she finished eating her eggs and resolved to stop faking the American sound (p. 175).

In order to make Americanah prominent as a symbolic of return migration, Adichie continues to present return migration as a common trend in the everyday Nigerian life. For making return migration the normal occurrence at the end of a migration story, Adichie makes it easy for Ifemelu to decide to return to Nigeria at a time when she is still clouded by uncertainty:

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 America or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise (p. 13).

Return migration as a normal end of international migration is equally observable through Ranyinudo, Ifemelu's friend, who makes her intended return look normal: "Lagos is now full of American returnees, so you better come back and join them" (p. 14).

This signification of return migration is also projected in Dike's visit to Nigeria. Although Dike has lived all of his life in America, he decides to pay a visit to Ifemelu, his cousin, in Nigeria. In the nature of that migrant who is ready to adapt in order to be accepted at home, Dike soon learns how to go to the back of the house and put on the generator when power goes off; he becomes eager and even desperate to transcend his ability to understand Igbo to being able to speak the language fluently and finally confesses to Ifemelu: "I kind of like it here." The import of Dike's statement in relation to the signification of Americanah is obvious because he makes the statement while standing on the corridor watching rain droplets in the typical Nigerian situation where rainfall is a harbinger of different woes:

The rain would come down, a sea unleashed from the sky, and the DSTV images would get grainy, phone networks would clog, the roads would flood and traffic would gnarl. She stood with Dike on the verandah as the early droplets came down.

“I kind of like it here,” he told her (p. 425).

The full import of Dike’s statement cannot be conceived until when placed in the context of the situation that precedes the statement. The description of the woes accompanying a common natural occurrence like the rain should ordinarily make the Nigerian environment less desirable for someone raised in America throughout his life. However, because Adichie is using the signification of Americanah to posit return migration as the end of every migration story, Dike, in spite of the ugliness, likes the Nigerian environment as every normal child loves and yearns for the mother. Through this literary turn, Adichie finally and significantly opens up the new path that she is charting for every migration story, not only in literature, but also in real-time.

BIOGRAPHY

Bimbola Oluwafunlola Idowu-Faith earned her PhD from the English Department of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her PhD thesis titled “Hyperfictional Language in Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story* and Megan Heyward’s *of day, of night*” is a stylistic investigation into how language materials, applied media aesthetics and textual creativities within hyperfiction texts blur the borders between postmodern literary theories and hypertext theories. She is presently at the Department of Mass Communication and Information Technology, Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu. Her interests are in the areas of stylistics, cultural semiotics, new media studies, trauma studies, women studies and film studies.

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