

## From Metamorphoses to Debacles of Migrants: A Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

**Simon KOSSAGLO,**  
[Simonkossaglo1@gmail.com](mailto:Simonkossaglo1@gmail.com)

Département d'Anglais  
Université de Lomé

&

**Kemealo ADOKI**  
[adokireine@gmail.com](mailto:adokireine@gmail.com)

Université de Kara

&

**Essobiyou SIRO**  
[essobiyousiro@gmail.com](mailto:essobiyousiro@gmail.com)

Université de Lomé

Reçu le : 05/10/2025    Accepté le : 03/11/2025    Publié le : 27/11/2025

### Abstract

Migration and globalization expose the challenge faced by migrants, undermining the idea of peace and success that these phenomena are often assumed to bring. This study establishes a link between migrants' transformations and failures, with reference to C. N. Adichie's *Americanah*, to explore the underlying causes of these debacles. It suggests interactions between natives and migrants to minimize fiascos and foster social change, as well as encouraging a spirit of self-reliance and adaptability at home so that peace and success can prevail. Based on Freud's classical psychoanalytic criticism, which takes into consideration the authors' personality, the reading mode, and the literary work itself, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of creative works. The work has found that the influence of new settings and obstacles to acculturation and integration are the main causes to migrants' transformations and debacles. A lack of altruist and interactions between natives and migrants bring cultural and identity quagmire. Furthermore, a lack of adaptability and self-reliance in one's home country can contribute to migration.

**Keywords** : migrants, motives, metamorphoses, social change, debacles, integration, interactions.

### **Résumé**

Les migrations et la mondialisation mettent en lumière les difficultés rencontrées par les migrants, remettant en question l'idée de paix et de réussite souvent associée à ces phénomènes. Cette étude établit un lien entre les transformations et les échecs des migrants, en s'appuyant sur l'œuvre « *Americanah* » de C. N. Adichie, afin d'explorer les causes profondes de ces difficultés. Elle suggère que les interactions entre populations autochtones et migrants permettent de minimiser les échecs et de favoriser le changement social, tout en encourageant l'autonomie et l'adaptabilité au sein du pays d'origine, condition essentielle à l'avènement de la paix et de la réussite. Fondée sur la critique psychanalytique classique de Freud, qui prend en compte la personnalité de l'auteur, le mode de lecture et l'œuvre littéraire elle-même, cette étude vise à approfondir la compréhension des œuvres créatives. Elle révèle que l'influence du nouvel environnement et les obstacles à l'acculturation et à l'intégration sont les principales causes des transformations et des échecs des migrants. Le manque d'altruisme et d'interactions entre populations autochtones et migrants engendre des difficultés culturelles et identitaires. Par ailleurs, le manque d'adaptabilité et d'autonomie dans son pays d'origine peut contribuer à la migration.

**Mots-clés** : migrants, motivations, transformations, changement social, échecs, intégration, interactions.

### **Introduction**

Migration has contributed to the ongoing evolution of societies across the world. It is a means of discovery and a way to exchange ideas, systems, or strategies. It has long been believed that moving to Western or developed countries brings change, success and wealth as a result of imperialism and colonization. Within this context, R. King et.al (1995, p. i) stated that "International migration has long been a dominant feature of world literature from both post-industrial and developing countries. The increasing demands of global economic system and continued political instability in many of the world's region have highlighted this shifting map

of the world's peoples". Hence literature from both rich and developing countries often explores migration, reflecting how economic pressures and political instability around the world are changing where people live. Yet for the past few decades, it has become a means of salvation, peace and a solution to war, natural disasters and all societal crises, especially poverty and bad governance in underdeveloped countries. Highlighting the causes, A. Kaboré (2016, p. 3) said: "Upon examining post-colonial African literature that deals with migration, one comes to the realization that the generally known migration story for African migrants is that of fleeing from poverty or war." The large-scale departures to Western countries have increased and drawn attention to the threats that migration represents for the places of departure, the destinations, and for the migrants themselves. A. Triandafyllidou and T. Maroukis (2012, p. 1) corroborate this idea when they posit: "International migration has intensified during the last two decades [...]".

Moreover, migration takes many forms and often involves dissatisfactions in places of departure as well as challenge in finding peace abroad. In this respect, K. R. Afagla (2018, p. 191) states that exile implies both fleeing from something and moving toward something. This explains the idea of movement and the quest for peace, health, tranquility and happiness as discussed by A. Pewissi (2021, p 43). Migration has become alarming as people flee poverty in their home countries for America and other Western nations.

Scholars then focus on the issue. Similarly, I. Palmary (2016, p. 20) posits: "From 2005 migration became a more central focus of study for me [...]". Here, Palmary emphasizes the relevance of migration. In this view, O. Sougou (2010, pp.13-27) posits the problematization of identity in migration. In this context, he examines the impacts of migration on the identity of migrants. What is more, C. Okonkwo (2010, pp.130-144) presents migrants' vicissitudes that is, the ordeals that prevent them from achieving their goals. J. Aglo (2019, pp. 49-53) stresses the issue through its causes. For him, Western hegemony and colonization prompt migration.

However, living in Western countries presents a paradox. Many migrants from Africa face significant hardships in destinations, which often prevent them from achieving their intended goals. C. Okonkwo (2010, p. 130) backs this idea when quoting Ike Oguine in a private interview: “For many of the Nigerian immigrants of my generation that I knew, coming to America was not so transformative.” Migrants’ lives, discourses, and international organizations reveal constant vicissitudes that account for African migrants’ setbacks in the process of acculturation and integration, as reflected in *Americanah*. Although migration is often associated with success and opportunity, the novel reveals crisis, racism, and social exclusion. These challenges complicate the process of assimilation. In this respect, this study shows how the changes migrants undergo the difficulties and failures they experience. Therefore, it explains that migrants’ transformations are not separated from their struggles; rather, these metamorphoses often contribute to or reveal the causes of their debacles. Thus, the study investigates the causes behind these setbacks. It also suggests strategies to improve migrants’ welfare and social development.

The study applies Freud’s classical psychoanalytic criticism to examine the causes of migrants’ debacles by analyzing the complications, the characters, and settings while considering the author’s personality, the reading approach and the literary work itself. Although this theory is originally implemented in medical fields, many critics advocate for its relevance and application to literary studies. M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham (2005, p. 256) argue this point: “Psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in an indirect and fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author.” Then, the roots of migrants’ debacles can be understood through the theory. L. Tyson (2006, pp. 35-36) proves the relevance of this theory through its implementation in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to generate meaning, as shown:

Similarly, a psychoanalytic reading of Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) might analyze the ways in which the novel reveals the debilitating psychological effects of racism, especially when these effects are internalized by its victims, which we see in the belief of

many of the black characters that their race has the negative qualities ascribed to it by white America. These psychological effects are evident, for example, in the Breedloves' conviction that they are ugly simply because they have African features [...].

The aforementioned context shows that the theory is concerned with linking migrants' difficulties and metamorphoses to their failure with the necessary strategies that would enable them to attain peace and fulfilment.

This study revolves around two axes. The first axis, migration and migrants metamorphose, provides the insights of the phenomenon with regard to the motives and examines migrants' experiences and provides insights into the phenomenon. The second axis presents migration in context by focusing on textual elements. In addition, it elaborates on the theory of social change in migration and offers recommendations for promoting change.

## **1. Migration and the Migrants' Metamorphosis**

This part discusses migrations with regard to the migrants' motives and establishes a correlation between migration and migrants' metamorphoses. Expounding on this concept, P. Tinghög (2009, p. 14) stated that "Immigrants are particularly likely to undergo such an individual acculturation process." This quotation asserts that immigrants undergo situations that transform them in the process of their settlements in new environments.

### **1.1. Understanding Migration from the Migrants' Motives**

The migratory adventure is backed by many circumstances. In *Americanah*, different motives justify leaving home. Many reasons pushed Ifemelu into migration. The strikes prevailing on the campus constitute a motive. The continuity of these strikes generates atmospheres of anxiety. Ifemelu has been thinking of the best solution for her studies, studies which are her investments for the future. But the strikes were hostile to this future. The text has been clear that strikes impact Ifemelu's migration due to the

persistence and the nationwide aspects it took. The passage is read as follows: “Ifemelu was restless, antsy; every day she listened to the news, hoping to hear that the strike was over. [...] The strike was nationwide [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 111).

Obviously, Ifemelu’s worries and the national aspect of the strikes highlight the threatened future of young Nigerians. These conditions empower the departure of Ifemelu in the sense that she has understood that her dreams of graduation could never be achieved in such conditions. This points her determination. Through the lens of psychoanalytic criticism, Ifemelu’s decision to emigrate is influenced by her unconsciousness. Without knowing, the strikes fuel her departure in the sense that she was animated by fear for not completing her studies. Her fear, as read in the narrative, comes from the closure of the universities. This grows anxiety within her about her future. Through her worries, it is shown that education is the Main motivation; her anxiety and fear serve as manifestations of her unconsciousness that drives her migration. Clearly, the disappointment the strikes created did not drown her will to complete her studies.

Like others, she still pondered on how to become successful. She believes in the assertion that education is a key to success. And for her, it is imperative to complete her schooling. So, she ultimately opted for migration as Obinze. Throughout this process her American expert and Uju provided encouragement and guidances. Ifemelu left Nigeria after she had got her visa. The fictionalized instabilities and the desire for education led many Nigerians to emigrate. This highlights education as a migration motive since it involves international student. In this vein, Pasura (2017:3) said: “[...] there is a global influx of international students in the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand and countries of the EU [...]” Passura’s perspective underscores education as a significant catalyst for migration, with Ifemelu fitting the profile of an international student migrant due to her relocation to the United States for higher education.

In addition, Obinze is a character ruled by the *American dream*. As Ifemelu was about to leave they made a plan: “Their plan became this: he would come to America the minute he graduated” (*Americanah*, pp. 123-124).

The departure of Ifemelu was not his propulsion into migration. The novel shows him obsessed with America. His conception is that America is the best place to emigrate to in order to become rich. The socioeconomic and political chaos of Nigeria was a minor input into his emigration. For this character, Nigeria means nothing. Psychologically, Obinze lives in a virtual America. Only his body remains in Nigeria, he is elsewhere. He symbolizes the alienation of Africans brought about education. His exchanges with his mother and with Ifemelu reveal his eagerness for the United States, to the point that Ifemelu refers to him as “[...] America expert [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 122). In fact, according to A. Sørensen (2024, p. 2): “[...] the idea of alienation has proved to retain a strong intuitive appeal [...].” This explains Obinze’s American dream. In the text, although, he remained in Nigeria, his process of acculturation had already begun. Obinze longed and became drunken for America. He developed an intense longing for America and became almost intoxicated by this idea. His deep knowledge and idealization of America ultimately alienated him from his own society. When his attempt to obtain an American visa repeatedly failed, he became desperate. Driven by his obsession with migration dream, he moved to England as a potential transit route to America; however, this attempt ultimately resulted in his alienation. In short, Obinze’s emigration was motivated by his American dream which leads to social isolation and emotional detachment.

Moreover, poverty has been one of the most important factors driving migration among Nigerian. This is illustrated in *Americanah* through the depiction of harsh living conditions. The narrative reveals that the poor conditions under which students lived were deeply discouraging. For instance, the unpleasant living conditions of the studies were not encouraging. Ifemelu’s daily experiences, in particular, highlight these unpleasant realities: “[...] she would hurry to the bathroom, to collect water in her bucket before the tap stopped, to squat over the toilet before it became unbearably full” (*Americanah*, P. 109). This expresses the unsatisfactory and unhealthy conditions caused by poverty. Poverty therefore plays a great role in Ifemelu’s decision to emigrate. Her connection with Uju and Ganika who live in the USA, heightens her

awareness of her own, and leads her to realize that the living and study conditions of Nigeria are sick and poor.

Consequently, the desire to experience life abroad where opportunities appear greater- grow within her, especially as she is encouraged by Uju: “Honestly, you should come and study here, I am sure you can easily get a scholarship” (*Americanah*, p. 121). The corpus illuminates that in America, Ifemelu’s excitement upon receiving a credit card during her registration process reflects her poor socio-economic background and the inadequate conditions under which she previously studied. From a psychoanalysis perspective, her unconscious desire to escape poverty functions as a motivation for migration. Emenike, whose economic background is the worst, smuggled into England as a result of poverty. Poverty drives him to England. As B. V. Ikejiaku (2021, p. 11) observes “[...] poverty stimulates emigration [...].” Emenike’s primary desire is to overcome poverty. Similarly, Obinze and Nicholas’s residence in England represent an attempt to escape economic hardship. Nichola’s advice to Obinze to struggle and become wealthy confirms this motivation. Furthermore, Obinze’s cellmate’s prayers and determination to resist deportation, clearly demonstrate that the fight against poverty is a main reason for migration. It is plain that fighting poverty is a motive. The text reads:

[...] his cellmate, another Nigerian, told him that he was not going to allow himself to be deported. He had a hardened, fleshless face. ‘I will take off my shirt and my shoes when they try to board me. I will seek asylum,’ he told Obinze. ‘If you take off your shirt and your shoes, they will not board you’ (*Americanah*, p. 349).

Obinze’s cellmate’s behavior reveals his determination to remain in England. It depicts the role of unconscious struggle against poverty and his refusal to return to Nigeria. This in turn, attests to the transformation of identity that occurs in the face of deportation.

The difference in currency values is another important factor driving migration, particularly the devaluation of African currencies. The conversion of a small amount of U.S. dollar or euros into African

currencies results in a much larger sum. This economic disparity symbolizes a strong motivation of migration. Ngozi Okonkwo exemplifies this motive as she migrates in order to accumulate capital and achieve wealth before eventually returning home: “[...] I don’t know if you remember Ngozi Okonkwo? She’s now an American citizen and she has gone back to Nigeria for a while, to start a business” (*Americanah*, p. 131). Ngozi Okonkwo’s migration to the USA was premediated and motivated by the devaluation of Nigerian currency. It is pecuniary. She wants to get money or become rich in order start business at home. Therefore, the gap in between African currencies and stronger currencies such as the U.S. dollar or the euro is another important factor driving to migration. In line with the text, B. V. Ikejiaku (2021, pp. 10-11) said that migration is opportunity to improve lives due to differences in incomes. Indeed, these differences attract Okonkwo. In the lens of psychoanalysis, the concept of monetary alienation, dream and unconscious are read. Okonkwo is attracted by the power of US dollar as her dream to become rich, unconsciously led her to America.

Besides, Uju’s persecution by her in-laws is clear motive for her migration. Her departure to the USA was prompted by these persecutions following the death of the General: “The General died the next week, in a military plane crash” (*Americanah*, p. 104). This made her flee to America unwillingly. Not being legally married, after the death of the husband, she felt threatened by her in-laws after the death of her husband. They threatened and opposed her, and the literary articulation of the threats represents her motive. She gathered her belonging went to exile. She moved to these USA on the advice of her friends, as a result of in-laws’ persecution and the sufferings that awaited her. In this regard, Uche said: “[...] Go to London or America. Do you have American visa?” “Yes” (*Americanah*, p. 106). These events reflect the effects of poverty from the man’s relatives and the bad living conditions in the country which lead this family to chase Uju out. Uju’s relationship with the General also stemmed from a lack of opportunities and resources, highlighting the wealth gaps in the country, that created their relationship because there were many wealth gaps in the country. A psychoanalysis reading of the text suggests that

Adichie portrays persecution and death as sources of migration. Thus, the General's death created a situation for opportunistic relatives to persecute Uju, demonstrating both poverty and exile as driving forces behind her migration.

The representation of bad governance in the fiction, functions as a generator of migration motives. Many of the causes of migration are direct effects of bad governance. In the same context, B. Gebrewold (2024, p. 37) argues that: "State failure, corruption, clientelism, poverty, external debt, unemployment, and weak economic institutions are seen in many migration discussions as root causes of postcolonial African migration to the West." Inferred from the quote, Gebrewold is of the same perspective. The aforementioned features function as symbols of bad governance. This interpretation is corroborated by the nationwide protest in Nigeria, which reflect the leaders' persistent refusal to address the population's demands, thereby compelling many citizens to migrate.

Psychoanalytic criticism interprets the generalization of the strike as evidence of power abuse, mismanagement of resources, and systemic injustice in Nigeria, which serve as migration motives, and reflect Adiche's psyche as inscribed in the text. In addition, unemployment is a major issue. Jobs are often created or allocated at the discretion of political leaders for their relatives or girlfriends, thereby disappointing those who truly deserve them. This situation is illustrated by the experience of Auntie Uju, who said: "[...] "The hospital has no doctor vacancy but The General made them create one for me" (*Americanah*, p. 55).

Everything in Nigeria is controlled by the authorities. This practice functions as an official condition attached to contracts and is therefore a clear sign of bad governance. It is a restriction put to the contracts and therefore a sign of bad governance which leads competent people to emigrate. As a result, many competent and qualified individuals are forced to emigrate. Through this portrayal, Adichie emphasizes the extent to which Nigeria is the mismanagement of the country. The country mismanagement is clearly highlighted in this passage: "She had been a pimp, as the story went, providing young girls for the army officers who,

in turn, gave her inflated supply contracts” (*Americanah*, p. 35). The passage from the novel highlight clientelism, corruption, and moral decay of political leaders. Restricting contracts to individuals who provide them with degrading and objectionable services is deeply harmful to Nigeria’s development. Such practices fuel poverty and unemployment, which in turn drive the aforementioned characters into migration as their only hope for a dignified life. From Adichie’s perspective, the partiality and bias of Nigerian leaders constitute a major cause of emigration

In this way, Nigeria’s political leadership directly contributes to the migration of its population. B. Gebrewold supports this view (2024, p. 37) by quoting Mills who puts that: “[...] Africa’s responsibility, i.e., poor economic governance structures cannot be neglected (Mills, 2010)”. The responsibility of Nigerian leaders is indeed central to the issue of migration. However, a reassessment of resource management and the implementation of good governance and sound policy frameworks could foster public satisfaction and significantly reduce the socio-political and economic crises that result in human migration.

## **1.2.Migrants’ Experiences and Metamorphoses**

Identity change is one of the impacts migration imposes on the immigrants through exposure to new settings’ cultures. P. Tinghög (2009, p. 14) in quoting Gordon (1978) and Graves (1967) relates that: “[...] exposure to different cultural influences may induce changes in behaviour, values or even sense of identity.” Migrants’ scrutiny in *Americanah* points out the change of their names to adapt themselves to the new settings. The complications Ifemelu encounters in the USA imposes identity change. In this respect, M. Feldner (2019, p. 190) accentuates: “She [Ifemelu] undergoes identity changes during her time in America [...]”. Here, Feldner refers to acculturation and assimilation but I focus on the aspect of name. The identity of Ngozi Okonkwo is forced onto Ifemelu. She has to use this new identity as a cover to get a job for survival. The scarcity of job and the requirements of America force her to bear Okonkwo’s identity.

Supporting Ifemelu will be a heavy charge for Uju. In this perspective, Uju has to help her use the means she might have exploited. Identity change is seen via the fictional portrayal of these characters. Inferred from Uju's behavior and the strategies, it is clear that before surviving in America, she has used another identity as cover. This is why she forced Okonkwo's identity on Ifemelu. As she said: "I talked to one of my friends, [...] I begged her and she agreed to let you work with her Social Security card." (*Americanah*, p. 131). The writer makes Ifemelu express her astonishment to use somebody's identity. But Uju's imposing manners bring Ifemelu to reason. She discovers her declining situation and admits the new identity. The use of the new identity pinpoints her illegality and the high probability that she will be a debacle. Adichie unveils the inseparable bond between migration and identity change. To illustrate this, she makes Aunt Uju assure Ifemelu with the case of Amara's cousin. Experiences forced Amara's cousin to become Amara. The example shows that using another person's identity points the complicated life of new immigrants.

Obinze is another instance of identity transformation. Upon migration to England he encountered severe hardship. As a consequence, leaving Nigeria for England has changed his name into Vincent Obi to get a little chance to survive due to his illegal status. Through negotiations he acquires a new identity. From that moment onward, Obinze becomes Vincent Obi as the narrative underlines: That evening, as dusk fell, the sky muting to a pale violet, Obinze became Vincent. (*Americanah*, p. 310). Under the assumed identity of Vincent, Obinze could do some jobs. In this respect, Obinze is presented as an illustration of identity change. Furthermore, his deportation illuminates the repetition of identity change through other deportees who change their name and emigrate again. These experiences illustrate the correlation of migration and identity transformation. This view is supported by F. Puddu (1997:193) who, quoting Glazer and Moynihan, states that: "[...] migration from one place to another often produces a transformation in identity due to the assimilation of cultural elements of the destination area (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975)." By the same token, life "[...] in a given environment, the achievement of [one's] desire depends upon the mood of this area... the geographical atmosphere

is involved in decision making and in search for self-identity” K. Adoki (2023, p. 215). It is evident that the geographic context shapes both occupational opportunities and personal identity, thereby influencing individuals’ choices, ambitions and personal growth.

In terms of language as identity, migrants often shift from their mother tongues to the dominant language of their new environment for social and economic advantages. Ifemelu Obinze, Uju and other characters were affected by the linguistic shift. Once in America and in England, these immigrants adopt English. In *Americanah* characters such as Ifemelu, Obinze, and Uju are affected by this linguistic shift. Upon migrating to the United States and England, they increasingly adopt English as their primary means of communication, especially in public and professional spaces. Although they do not completely abandon Igbo, their reduced use of it reflects the pressure to conform to the linguistic norms of their host societies. This shift illustrates their process of acculturation, as language becomes a key tool for integration and assimilation in the new settings. G. Lamming stresses this change in the context of West Indians. He said: “[...] the British West Indian had to make English his [...]” (1960, p. 31). The appropriation of the new language affects the linguistic and cultural identity of the characters. This adaptation exemplifies the unbreakable attachment between migration and identity change.

Characters such as Ifemelu and Uju symbolize this change. In her attempt to fit into American society, Ifemelu abandons her Igbo-influenced English and adopts an American accent, reflecting how linguistic adaptation becomes a strategy for social acceptance and belonging: “[...] she [Ifemelu] began to practice an American accent.” (*Americanah*, p. 164). Linguistic difference contributes to the social isolation of migrants, while the adoption of the dominant American accent may facilitate closer integration into the host society. The coming quote is a manifest proof: “Dike, put it back,” Auntie Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 133). This linguistic and cultural change depicted by Adichie, affects their sense of identity. Besides, Uju’s refusal to speak to Dike is a clear manifestation of

Igbo, and her failure to transmit it to her son signifies a cultural transformation brought about by migration. Vincent Obi is also affected by this change. His adoption of a British accent and his consistent use of English, even when interacting with fellow Igbo people underline his altered sense of identity. These examples reflect the concept of hybridity, which is explored through psychoanalytic criticism.

Finally, the immigrants are portrayed as being caught between two cultures -the Nigerian and the Western - which problematize their sense of belonging. They are perceived as neither Nigerians nor fully Westerner.

Along with, social isolation or avoidance is a new behavior that emigrants adopt. The writer uses Obinze to illustrate this experience. He was denied integration and assimilation due to his illegal status and through the lack of opportunities. In his job as a toilet cleaner, particularly the incident involving a mound of feces on the toilet lid, he symbolizes his social degradation. His recollection of Ojiugo's words, which point to English discrimination, further sheds light on this issue: "He thought about the famed repression of the English. His cousin's wife, Ojiugo, had once said, "English people will live next to you for years but they will never greet you" (*Americanah*, p. 293). Through Obinze and Ojiugo's experiences, the novel shows that England discriminates against migrants and highlights the transmission racist behavior. In this respect, Obinze is discriminated against by his relatives and friends from Nigeria. An instance is the lack of interaction between him and Nicholas, even though Nicholas was accommodating him. In addition, instead of helping him, Vincent Obi bullied him by reporting him to his boss as an illegal worker, which caused him to lose his job.

Through the attitudes of Obi and Nicholas, the novel shows that the isolation among migrants is a new attitude, contrary to the harmony and fraternity that united them at home. It indicates a change in some of the qualities that represent their identity. The rejection by Nicholas and the betrayal by Obi imply social isolation, a transformation imposed by migration. It is a form of discrimination that occurs among migrants

themselves. This results from the difficulties imposed by their new settings. Aligning with this idea, F. Puddu (1997, p. 205) details discrimination as follows: “[...] these range from being bullied at school, to discrimination in employment and at work [...]”. Nicholas and Obi bullied Obinze. Thus, avoiding one another becomes a form of discrimination, a new trait that migrants adopt. These attitudes highlight social isolations within the migrant’s community.

Stress and Aggressiveness are other behaviors exhibited by migrants in the narrative. In fact, these two states of mind arise from the disappointment and challenges they face. S. Cissé (2024:40) upholds this: “Instability can lead to many other states of mind.” Instability often drives migrants to experience stress and aggression. Ifemelu, for instance, is overwhelmed by the anxieties caused by the challenges she deals with in her process of acculturation. Ifemelu was unable to integrate into American society due to being denied essential resources, including employment, housing, and financial support for her settlement. As a result, she experienced a lack of peace and security. Consequently, Adichie vividly depicts the pressures she endures: “She woke up every day worrying about money. If she bought all the textbooks she needed, she would not have enough to pay her rent [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 165). This shows how unmet needs stress migrants. Attempts to change her situation only worsened it, as she failed to overcome challenge. Her stress results from her inability to cope with these threats.

In this respect, R. Ford (1992, p. 53) said: “The term stress has been used here to refer to the inappropriate application of the reaction to a perceived threat.” Mismanagement of problems leads to stress, and Ifemelu’s failure to manage her needs intensifies it. Through her experience, Adichie highlights the significant impact of migration and mental health. Furthermore, Ifemelu’s sexual relationship adds to her emotional pressure, contributing to depression as Ginika said: “[...] “I think you’re suffering from depression” (*Americanah*, p. 194). Migration, indeed, deeply affects her well-being.

Uju unconsciously becomes aggressive due to the stress caused by her exams, failures and the hardships. She exhibits apathy towards other people. In short, there is no longer any caring relationship between her and Ifemelu. This new behavior reflects a change in her identity. Failing to reach her goals makes her react violently. And, even her silence expresses stress and aggressiveness because she is always nervous. In this vein, Ifemelu remarked: “Ifemelu had noticed it right away at the airport, her roughly braided hair, her ears bereft of earrings, her quick casual hug, as if it had been weeks rather than years since they had last seen each other. [...] Their silence was full of stones” (*Americanah*, p. 128). This quote epitomizes the extent of Uju’s anxiety and aggressiveness. Indeed, her tense silence reflects conflict. It is already a source of anxiety and regret for Ifemelu. She considers apologizing though she does not understand the causes of Uju’s aggressiveness. This unconscious violence illustrates profound metamorphosis in Uju, showing that she has undergone a significant change in identity.

Dike is used as a character to illustrate the effects of stress and pressure. As a child, he was traumatized by the consequences of migration. He endured many vicissitudes, but the stress eventually overweighs him, culminating in suicide attempt. From a psychoanalysis perspective, this act portrays the impact of stress and depression, showing how extreme pressures can affect a young migrant. In this regard, his mother reveals: “Ifemelu, his suicide attempt was from depression,” [...] “Do people just wake up and become depressed?” (*Americanah*, p. 470). Depression is the accumulation of stresses. Like other migrants, Dike becomes depressed because he can no longer manage the pressures in his life. This shows that stress dominates his existence. M. Schouler-Ocak (2015:3) reinforces his argument by drawing on (Fazel et al. 2005; Crumlish and O’Rourke 2010)’s ideas in these lines: “Various studies point out that the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is around ten times higher among refugees and asylum seekers than among the general population of the host country.” The rise of trauma and stress among migrant populations establishes a clear link between migration and strain. Stress often results from disappointments and challenges that await them in a new

environment. In short, stress and aggressiveness are manifestations of identity changes in migrants. Though these behavioral changes are related to migration, the principles of global migration should be valued to make the processes of assimilation and acculturation less difficult. This would allow migrants to integrate into new societies more effectively, ensuring their long-term success.

## **2. Migration in the Novel Context**

In the context of the novel, characters move from their place of origin, Nigeria to America and England. These movements from their homeland to the foreign countries is qualified as migration and will be examined within this framework.

### **2.1. Marking Migrations with Textual Ingredients (Elements)**

In the novel under study, there are various markers of migration. These markers include both physical and virtual spaces in the novel that characters occupy as a result of their movements throughout the narrative. The novel presents Ifemelu's migration from Nigeria to America for several reasons.

The sociopolitical and economic crises in Nigeria push her to move with the aim of completing her education. Education and personal advancement are the main priorities. Henceforth, she travels in search of fulfilment. Unfortunately, her expectations are not met and she becomes disillusioned. She fails to complete her studies because she lacks the necessary resources. In this respect, she said: "I'm not an academic. I don't even have a graduate degree" (*Americanah*, p. 421). Implicitly, this reveals the manifest impact of anti-immigration policies in America, which have increasingly tightened immigration conditions. H. Sohn (2022, p. 2) notes that "Immigration enforcement and deportation policy changed substantially from 2001 to 2019." In this statement, Sohn lays emphasis on the growing enforcement and deportation.

Subsequently, living in America was not easy for Ifemelu. Her student visa did not allow her to take up employment, which severely limited her opportunities. Consequently, her stay in America was a debacle due to the prevailing discriminations of the American society. Therefore, she neither fulfilled her dreams and aspirations nor secured stable employment. The difficulty of renting a room and paying the rent placed additional pressure on her due to her lack of income. Ultimately, Ifemelu's experience in America was bitter, leading to her decision to return.

As a result, Obinze's movement is set between Nigeria and England. It is clear that he was not prepared to live England as his intended destination was America. His troubles began when his lover left for America and his visa was denied. Obinze then moved to England with the intention of transiting to America to reunite Ifemelu, however this plan failed. He soon discovered that migration was far more difficult than he had anticipated. This experience reflects the disillusionment faced by many migrants.

In this context, D. M. Ugwanyi (2014, p. 252) highlights the failure of migrants in the Western zones. Given the adversities encountered by Obinze, it is evident that England was not beneficial to him. A close analysis of the narrative reveals that Obinze's ordeal intensified after expiration of his six months visa expired, rendering him an illegal immigrant and a fugitive. As an illegal immigrant, his main challenge was to escape the police and the immigration officers while searching for work in order to survive. He took on any job he could find. It was under these conditions that he became a toilet cleaner, and his efforts were ultimately exploited by the Angolans who manipulated him with the promise for a sham marriage that would never take place: "The Angolans told him how things had "gone up," or were more "tough," opaque words that were supposed to explain each new request for more money." (*Americanah*, p. 325)

He was unable to transit to America because he lacks financial means. England proved difficult for him due to the many vicissitudes he encountered. Like Ifemelu, Obinze could not rent an apartment in England because of his illegal status, which prevented him from securing

employment. On Nicholas's advice, he attempted a sham marriage; however, this plan failed and instead led to his arrest by immigration authorities for deportation. As a consequence, he did not succeed in building a stable life in England.

Obinze thus illustrates the predicaments faced by migrants in England. His experiences were bitter, marked by segregation from friends, relatives, and English society at large. The eventual discovery of the harsh realities of life in England leads him to accept his deportation. When Obinze tells the immigration officer: "I'm willing to go back to Nigeria" (*Americanah*, p. 345), his reaction suggests that he can no longer endure the conditions that have overwhelmed him. Consequently, he is deported. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Obinze's situation can be read in terms of melancholia, loss, and shame, as his aspirations and objectives remain unfulfilled. In this framework, D. M. Ugwanyi (2014, p. 252) reinforces: "This is tragic; more pathetic is that after one succeeds in crossing over, one discovers that one has to pass through ordeals to ordinarily survive [...]." This instance shows the complications leading the migrants to fail.

Meanwhile, an analysis of Emenike portrays him as a failure. In England, the freedom and success he had hoped to achieve vanished. His subjugation under Georgina through a sham marriage highlights his powerless position, a situation mirrored in Obinze's own struggles. Thus, Emenike's emigration failed to fulfill his objectives. Then, he declared: "I miss Naija. It's been so long but I just haven't had the time to travel back home. Besides, Georgina would not survive a visit to Nigeria!" (*Americanah*, p. 328).

His dissatisfaction is displayed through his longing for home and the control his wife exercised over him. Through Uju and Dike, the narrative revisits the movement from Nigeria to America, highlighting a tendency toward Western societies. However, America did not provide positive opportunities for these characters. Uju repeatedly failed her exams, and when she finally passed, racial discrimination prevented her from obtaining a proper medical position. The struggle is revealed in her three jobs: "She was working three jobs, not yet qualified to practice medicine

in America” (*Americanah*, p. 121). This is a debacle. It is crystal clear that her objectives were not achieved. Instead of peace, predicaments and discrimination marked their lives, making return to Africa the only viable alternative. Uju’s move back to Africa was ultimately fulfilling: “She had joined African Doctors for Africa [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 371).

There, she secured a job and a partner -things unattainable in the USA due to discrimination. Similarly, Dike benefited from his visit to Nigeria; his mood improved, and the trauma resulting from a previous suicide attempt caused by stress and stigma was alleviated. The narrative shows that their dreams were unfulfilled in America, while his post on Facebook reflects his happiness in Nigeria: “[...] he captioned it: *No lions yet to eat me, folks*” (*Americanah*, p. 523). The American society acted as a barrier to migrants’ happiness. The return of Okonkwo to Nigeria also demonstrates the failure of migration to fulfill personal goals. Additionally, the exploitative behavior of two Angolans illustrates the hardships migrants face after leaving their home countries. More broadly, African migrants in America often experienced similar setbacks. M. Feldner (2019, p. 115) corroborates with the example of Obi:

‘I had remained at the margins— for the previous year I really hadn’t been living in America but in a sort of halfway country, a sort of satellite life outside the life that went on, tenu- ously linked to the American way of life by work and a common currency, shops and television

Clearly, Obi, like many African migrants in Western metropolises, experiences failure. This failure often leads migrants to form diasporic associations to support themselves. In *Americanah*, a pertinent example is the African Students Association, which includes members from almost all African nationalities and holds meetings in basements (*Americanah*, pp. 170-171). The choice of basements - spaces often associated with marginalization -reflects their inability to access better accommodations and highlights their struggles within the host society. Such circumstances reveal the migrants’ challenges in achieving their objectives. For migrants to meet their goals in any destination, meaningful interactions with the

natives are essential, and altruistic support from others can serve as a cornerstone for the flourishing of individuals and their communities.

## 2.2. Writing Migration for Social Change

Migrants' development often refers to the peace and progress they seek. Unfortunately, many fail to achieve these goals. This failure compels characters like Ifemelu, Obinze, and others to return home. As A. Kaboré (2016, p. 9) noted: "The migrants' return to their countries of origin occurs, according to these theorists, as a consequence of their failed experiences abroad, or because their great expectations were not met." If their bitter experiences and efforts at acculturation and assimilation lead them to return, it indicates that social change was not achieved abroad. Paradoxically, African migrants often fail despite undergoing significant personal transformations. Adichie emphasizes that while characters such as Ifemelu, Obinze, Uju, and Dike endure many challenges, they do not achieve social progress in their host countries.

Economically, these characters show little advancement in their destinations. They remain restricted by limited access to opportunities that could boost their social mobility. While they undergo many cultural and linguistic transformations -adapting accents, learning English, and acquiring new cultural habits-these adaptations do not translate into improved social status. For example, Ifemelu lives in substandard conditions: "[...] she slipped out of the room and turned on the kitchen light. A fat cockroach was perched on the wall near the cabinets [...]" (*Americanah*, p. 130). They remain migrants, facing discrimination and frustration.

In terms of identity, they occupy a liminal cultural space, neither fully belonging to their homeland nor their host country. Their expectations in migrating remain unfulfilled. Adichie uses their hardships to highlight the predicaments of African migrants and to depict the development of a

“double consciousness,” allowing the characters to reflect on the true source of peace and social change.

Through these literary representations, Adichie critiques the disillusionments faced by African migrants, creating awareness of their struggles. Henceforth, she uses her aesthetics to return some key characters to Africa, suggesting that achieving one’s dreams is often more attainable at home than abroad.

The theory of return migration in *Americanah* plays a significant role in illustrating migrants’ social change and helps uncover the root causes of the challenges they face. Obinze and Ifemelu’s return home shows that the USA or England did not fundamentally change them. From the perspective of the author, who is herself an immigrant, the text suggests that peace and success must be cultivated at home rather than sought abroad. Psychologically, through return migration, Adichie conveys the idea that true fulfilment can be attained at home. She highlights the value of the theory of return migration in enabling social change.

In the narrative, Obinze serves as a prime example: after bitter experiences in England, he realizes that only his homeland can preserve his dignity. Kaboré (2016, p.9) also highlights the idea of return in *Americanah* by saying: “Adichie uses characterization to depict such cases of return migration.” Through characters, Adichie concretizes return migration to value home. She highlights the link between migrants’ bliss and home to impact people. Obinze became self-confident and amazed the immigration officer by telling him, he wants to leave as shown: “He was going to tick on a form that his client was willing to be removed” (*Americanah*, p. 345). From his experiences in England to his symbolic success at home, the author suggests that there is no Eldorado unless you forge it by hardworking, self-reliance and self-confidence.

In this sense, N. Mandela (1965, p. 31) said: “You can see that ‘there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach

the mountain tops of our desires.” From this understanding, Obinze became rich without reaching America. Ifemelu said: “Look at you. Big man with your Range Rover. Having money must have really changed things” (*Americanah*, pp. 531-532). The prosperity of Obinze at home displays the values of home and the highest possibilities of social progress at home as portrayed by Adichie.

Adichie uses the symbolic return of Okonkwo and Ifemelu to illustrate social change and the impact of return migration on society. Through their homecoming, she validates the theory of return migration. M. Feldner (2019, p. 186) highlights this ideology of return in his scrutiny: “At some point, however, her Nigerian identity reasserts itself and she starts drifting back towards Nigeria, first only mentally, and then also physically. This movement constitutes the fourth stage finalized by her return to Nigeria.” The resurgence of migrants’ original identities points out dissatisfactions that prompts a mental return followed then by a physical return. Though Ifemelu and Okonkwo hold the green cards, they return to start business and work in their homeland. This demonstrates their awareness of the importance of home for individual fulfilment and social progress. As Ifemelu observed: “Most of us have come back to make money in Nigeria, to start businesses, to seek government contracts and contacts. Others have come with dreams in their pockets and a hunger to change the country [...]” (*Americanah*, p. 519). Returning home brings out the possibility of a more peaceful and rewarding life than abroad. These returnees are still recognized by their homeland, reflecting a sense of belonging. Moreover, their commitment and investments have the potential to transform their country into an Eldorado.

In this way, Adichie’s theory of return migration seeks to educate and inspire transformation. In this perspective A. Pewissi (2017, p. 78) said: “Education is character training. Values are thought to form and transform the mindsets.” It is assumed that migrants have understood that true fulfilment can only be achieved there. Home then gives peace and success to Obinze, Ifemelu and other migrants who return especially during Dike’s visit to Nigeria. This stresses how peace, bliss and deliverance can be

attained at home. Socially, they have been transformed. All in all, home is the best place for development and where migrants can find peace as D. M. Ugwanyi (2014, p. 252) noticed: “[...] home is home, the best.” It provides stability, general peace, and opportunities for self-development. Therefore, returning home or staying in one’s home country is very important. However, self-confidence, a spirit of self-reliance, and the ability to adjust are also imperative. At the same time, facilitating migrants’ integration into new settings can enable them to flourish abroad.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study has been to establish a connection between migrants’ vicissitudes, metamorphoses and debacles. The first part of the study has elaborated on migration and migrants’ metamorphoses in the narrative. It dwelt on the motives that led Nigerians to England and the USA and the changes they underwent. The second part contextualized the movement with textual elements and social change.

Based on psychoanalytical criticism, the study has come up with the ideas that in *Americanah*, the sociopolitical and economic conditions have compelled Nigerians to emigrate. It also underscored factors such as education, alienation, mismanagement of resources and bad governance as key factors in Nigerians’ migration. The study has highlighted that African migrants are often affected by identity changes and social isolation that result from limited interactions between migrants and the natives, which act as barriers to acculturation and integration. It further has shown that migrants’ failure to adapt causes psychological stress and may transform them into aggressive individuals in the new settings.

Moreover, the study has revealed that many migrants experience failure, and that social change and success are not always found abroad but can also be achieved at home. As the world continues to evolve, migration remains an unavoidable societal issue. The study therefore has suggested fostering interactions and altruist relationship between migrants and natives to promote integration and well-being in host societies. It has also

proposed that self-reliance and adaptability can bring peace and social change, affirming that home can be a vital source of stability and success.

## References

ABRAMS Meyer Howard and HARPHAM Geoffrey Galt, 2005, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, USA, Thomson Wadworth.

ADICHIE Chimamanda Ngozi, 2013, *Americanah*, New York, Anchor Books, a Division of Random House LLC.

ADOKI Kemealo, 2023, “Eternalism and Crisis of Identity in Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name*”, “*Revue Internationale de Langue, Littérature, Culture et Civilisation : RILLICC. Actes de colloque international, Multilingual Annual Journal*, vol.3, N°1, Lomé-Togo, Pp 207-222.

AFAGLA Kodjo Ruben, 2018, *Organic Intellectualism and Colonialism*, Representations in Lamming, Marshall and Cook-Lynn, 17 Meldrum Street, Beau Bassin 71504, Mauritius, Éditions universitaires européennes.

AGLO John, 2019, *Théorie générale de la norme : Les Fondements normatifs de la substantialisation*, Lomé, Presses de l’Université de Lomé, PUL, 2019 & Atelier de Recherche en Civilisation, ARC, ISBN 978-2-916789-26-2.

CISSÉ, Seydou, 2024, “A Peaceful and Secured Environment in a Shifting and Multiracial World: A Literary Reflection on Rebecca Walker’s *Black, White and Jewish* (2001),” *In Multilingual Annual Journal*, Vol. 4-No. 1, pp. 135-150.

FELDNER Maximilian, 2019, *Narrating the New African Diaspora: 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context*, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05743-5\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05743-5_10).

FORD Reuben, 1992, *Migration and Stress among Corporate Employees*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London.

GEBREWOLD Belachew, 2024, *Postcolonial African Migration to the West: A Mimetic Desire for Being*, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan. SSN 2520-8896 ISSN 2520-890X (electronic), *Politics of Citizenship and Migration*, ISBN 978-3-031-58567-8 ISBN 978-3-031-58568-5 (eBook), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58568-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58568-5_1).

IKEJIAKU Brian-Vincent, 2021, "Migration, Poverty, the Role of State, (International) Law and Development in the Industrialised Countries of Europe," in *Law and Development Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ldr-2021-0045>.

KABORÉ André, 2016, "Migration in African Literature: a Case Study of Adichie's work", Université de Ouagadougou, *Revue du CAMES: Littérature, langues et linguistique, Numéro 4, 1<sup>er</sup> Semestre 2016*.

KING Russell, CONNELL John and WHITE Paul 1995, *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and migration*, London and New York, Routledge.

LAMMING George, 1960, *The Pleasures of Exile*, The United States of America, The University of Michigan Press.

MANDELA Nelson, 1965, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, USA, Heinemann.

OKONKWO Christopher, 2010, "'Coming to America': Ike Oguine's *A squatter's Tale* and the Nigerian / African Immigrant's Narrative," In Emenyonu N. Ernest(ed), *New Novels in African Literature Today*, Nigeria, HEBN Publishers Plc, Pp: 130-144.

PALMARY Ingrid (2016), *Gender, Sexuality and Migration in South Africa*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan.

PASURA Rinos, 2017, "International education and migration nexus: experiences and outcomes of international students in private vocational education and training providers in Melbourne, Australia," in *International Journal of Training Research*. DOI:10.1080/14480220.2017.1416656, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2017.1416656>.

PEWISSI Atafëi, 2017 *Rethinking Womanism: When Difference Maps Chaos*, Ghana, Yamens Press Limited.

PEWISSI Atafëi, 2021, *Mon projet de paix en 100 maximes*, Lomé, Editions Awoudy.

PUDDU Franca, 1997, *The Irish on Tyneside: Migration and Identity*, Durham theses, Durham University, Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1710/>.

SCHOULER-OCAK Meryam (2015), "Introduction: The Relevance of Trauma Among Immigrants," in Meryam Schouler-Ocak (ed.), *Trauma and Migration, Cultural Factors in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Traumatised Immigrants*, Switzerland, Springer International Publishing, pp. 3-8, ISBN 978-3-319-17334-4, ISBN 978-3-319-17335-1 (eBook), DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-17335-1.

SOHN Heeju, 2022, "Deportations and departures: Undocumented Mexican immigrants' return migration during three presidential administrations," Edited by Richard Alba, City University of New York (CUNY) The Graduate Center, New York, NY; received July 15, 2022; accepted December 9, 2022.

SØRENSEN Asger, 2024, "Alienation Recuperating the Classical Discussion of Marx et al., The Netherlands, Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden.

SOUGOU Omar, 2010, "Ambivalent Inscriptions: Women, Youth and Diasporic Identity in Buchi Emecheta's Later Fiction," In Emenyonu N. Ernest(ed), *New Novels in African Literature Today*, Nigeria, HEBN Publishers Plc, Pp: 13-27.

TCHEKI Eyanawa, 2024, "Identity Issue in Postcolonial Context: A Comparative Study of Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe and Marita Golden's Don't Play in the Sun*," In *Multilingual Annual Journal*, Vol. 3-No. 2, pp. 21-35.

TINGHÖG Petter, 2009, *Migration, Stress and Mental Ill Health*, Post-migration Factors and Experiences in the Swedish Context, Linköping, Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, No. 480, Dissertations on Health and Society, No. 16, Department of Medical and Health Sciences, Linköping University, Linköping 2009.

TRIANDAFYLLIDOU Anna and MAROUKIS Thomas, 2012, *Migrant Smuggling*, Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

TYSON Lois (2006), *Critical Theory Today A User-Friendly Guide*, The United State of America, Routledge.

UGWANYI Dele Maxwell, 2014, "Migration, disillusionment and diasporic experiences in Segun Afolabi's Goodbye Lucille and a Life Elsewhere," in *International Journal of English and Literature*.  
<http://www.academicjournals.org/IJE>