

**Synchronicity and Asynchronicity:
The Migrant Adaptation Process in Selected African Migrant
Novels**

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Abstract

In the migrant's adaptation process, there is a divide between fitting in and finding it difficult to adapt. Using textual analysis, this paper investigates these conflicting factors in selected African migrant novels, examining each factor under the prescribed terminologies of "synchronicity" and "asynchronicity". The paper is both qualitative and content based, and uses as theoretical framework The Adaptation Process. In Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*, the paper has as its findings the following: that to successfully achieve synchronicity, which is to integrate, a migrant has to attain structural integration, cognitive integration, social integration, and identificatory integration in the host society. Models of Western thought are seen to dominate in the host society overseas. To adapt, the migrant has no choice but to modify his or her cultural conduct and expression to conform to the standard of the host society. The paper recommends that further literary studies be conducted on the role that language has to play in ensuring synchronicity.

Introduction

Seeking for a better fortune away from their country, faced with limited possibilities, has overtime been the quest of migrants. By this, the migrant is seen to be desirous of one thing – self-fulfilment. In the diaspora, however, one finds that the process of adaptation for the immigrant has been, on the one hand, between fitting in and, on the other hand, finding it difficult to adapt. This perceived conflict for fitting in goes against the expectations of integration found in the suitable

definition by Ted Cattle. In it, integration is seen as the production of new multicultural forms of living together as a result of a mutual openness to change, the breaking down of boundaries, and the mixing or hybridisation of cultural practices. For the purpose of this research, it is fitting to term the first factor in the adaptation divide “synchronicity” and the second conflicting factor, “asynchronicity.” For the migrant, synchronicity comes from the root word ‘sync’ which is to harmonise. It is the idea of the migrant blending in pleasantly and making do with the resources at his or her disposal or with the opportunity given or presented with. Asynchronicity, on its part, is the idea of not fitting in, that is, finding it difficult to adapt in the new geographical environment. According to Christopher Sonn, “Immigration, voluntary or involuntary, is a transition that often entails the severing of community ties, the loss of social networks and familiar bonds -- it can mean the loss of taken for granted sources and systems of meaning” (2). When the severing of community ties and the loss of social networks and familiar bonds take place, there is bound to be tension which arises from the uncertainty of fitting in well in the new community or, in the absence of that, not fitting in well and feeling alienated as a result of that.

In the diaspora, the severing of social networks poses most dangerous. “The severing of these networks and the removal of interpersonal and sociocultural supports that may follow migration can contribute to negative social and psychological health outcomes for individuals and groups” (Krupinski, 1984). Even though the possibility of social network may in supposition follow the immigration experience, “chances for successful settlement in the new country may be enhanced if individuals and groups have access to social and support systems including those that are based on the home culture” (Sonn 8). That is, by interacting also with people from their home country with whom they share culture, migrants stand a greater chance of achieving synchronicity. This is why encouraging social and support systems is essential for the migrant and should not be considered optional. Sonn further points out that: “Although the process of migration-adaptation is a challenging experience, it can also mean hope for a better future, safety, and security for many individuals and groups” (2). Here, one finds one of the features of synchronicity which is to inspire the migrant towards anticipating a better future.

Review of Related Scholarship

This research is conducted with the view to making the integration process succeed by adding to the vast literature on migrant integration in which not many have been literary. The studies reviewed represent the extent to which researchers have fared in this regard.

Ingeborg Kongslien (2006) examines how immigrant writers integrate in Nordic countries. The immigrant writers Kongslien studies include Swedish novelist, Theodor Kallifatides, who migrates from Greece; Norwegian novelist, Khalid Hussain, who migrates from Pakistan; and Danish poet, Milena Rudez, who migrates from Bosnia-Herzegovina. After a textual analysis of Kallifatides' *A new land outside my side* (2001), Hussain's *Pakkis* (1986), Rudez's poetry collection *The Blind Traveller from Sarajevo* (2002), and the novels and poems of several Nordic immigrants in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, Kongslien observes that "Dealing with the themes of migration and exile, biculturalism and bilingualism, and acculturation and identity formation, they have introduced new fields of reference into the Nordic literatures and have challenged and expanded the national literary canons" (1). This study, and its observation, confirms how effective immigrant writers can be once they integrate in a host society. Again, the study gives credence to the multicultural and intercultural nature of their literature also studied by Saša Stanišić (2008) and Benzi Zhang (2016).

Onyekachi Wambu (2011) explores the pressures of integration and transformation that affect the first Third World migrant writers who make their way to London for greener pastures. He reflects their frustrating experiences in novels like Nirad Chaudhuri's *A Passage to England* (1959), Samuel Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1957), and ER Braithwaite's *To Sir with Love* (1959) and *Paid Servant* (1962). Wambu however does not investigate or demonstrate from these texts the ways in which the examined migrant pressures of integration and transformation, which are inclusive of racial rejection and freedom, can be solved. He only reveals from his investigation how publishing houses nonetheless helped in promoting the voices of these migrant writers.

Pedja Jurisic, in a sociological study of the migrant poet, Yahya Hassan, reflects the failures of integration in Denmark. According to Jurisic, "The young life of Yahya Hassan [which is reflected in his poetry] could be used to illustrate both the failures of integration, and the promise of a more socially inclusive Denmark" (n.pag.). Jurisic does not examine how the integrative process can become successful, while other researchers that do focus on its granting of multicultural and intercultural status alone. Filling this gap considerably becomes necessary, need being that if the

integration process succeeds, the society is said to be open to people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or social class.

Theoretical Framework

The theory employed in this paper is The Adaptation Process as explicated by Maureen Gallagher (2007). Gallagher identifies four types of integration that are very necessary in the migrant adaptation process. They are structural integration, cognitive integration, social integration, and identificatory integration. These types of integration are well reflected in African migrant novels. And when there is integration, synchronicity is said to have taken place. To demonstrate how these integrative tendencies as well as non-integrative tendencies emerge, four novels have been studied in this paper. They are Ike Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale* (2000), Bulawayo NoViolet's *We Need New Names* (2013), Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007), and Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010). The settings in these novels provide the contexts in which cultural identities, histories, and other social identities can be affirmed. The settings are therefore illustrative of the adaptation issues discussed.

Structural integration is said to be an individual's acquisition and occupation of relevant positions in society. A single word for it is placement. It is associated with the acquisition of certain rights and privileges that belong to particular positions, which include the opportunity to establish relevant social relations and to win cultural, social and economic capital. "Cognitive integration refers to the acquisition of knowledge, cultural standards and competences by an individual, which are necessary for successfully interacting in a given society" (Gallagher 99). A single word for it is mentioned as 'culturation' or 'socialisation.' Social integration refers to the formation of networks and social relations, the establishment of friendships, and love or marriage relationships across group boundaries" (Gallagher 99). This is seen as 'interaction.' Finally, "identificatory integration means that individuals see themselves as an element of a collective body. Identification has cognitive and emotional aspects and results in a 'we' feeling among a group or collective" (Gallagher 100).

Synchronicity

To integrate is a process to achieve synchronicity. According to Wolfgang Bosswick and Friedrich Heckmann, “Integration is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society” (11). From the point of view of immigrants, integration is said to mean “the process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights and obligations, gaining access to positions and social status, building personal relationships with members of the host society and forming a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, that society” (Bosswick and Heckmann 11). In Ike Oguine’s *A Squatter’s Tale*, one sees adaptation tendencies that help the migrant achieve synchronicity. While squatting at his uncle’s place in America, fellow Nigerian squatters that Obi meets at the apartment pretend not to have heard his question about what they did for a living. At this point, the reader is informed that Obi soon learns that “to ask [his] countrymen and women in America questions about their jobs was most indiscreet; the successful ones and the liars told you before you asked, others maintained a stony silence or made vague sounds...” (*A Squatter’s Tale* 20). The writer even adds that “many people have acquired lifelong enemies just by asking too insistently” (20). As far as gendered relations are concerned in a foreign environment like America, the migrant on fresh arrival learns fast to adjust in his gendered relations with fellow migrants like himself that have long been in the foreign country before him. This, for him is needed to achieve synchronicity.

In another dimension, to avoid coming to terms with the reality of disillusionment, migrants live upon fantasies and lies that they convince themselves to be the truth, and when they meet other migrants that happen to be new arrivals, they feed them with this hope from a make-believe reality. In *A Squatter’s Tale* for instance, as a way of showing Obi around on his arrival in the United States, Uncle Happiness insists on taking him out for a drink. On the drive, Uncle Happiness repeats with confidence all kinds of false stories, like planning on getting a four-bedroom apartment where Obi would be comfortable, but then, he gives the unfortunate excuse that people in America duped him. He goes on to share a bright hope that would become a reality only on collaborative effort. He tells Obi that since Obi is very educated and intelligent, he intends joining his twenty-four-year experience in America with Obi’s brilliance, and together, Uncle Happiness believes they will get whatever they want. In the first person narrative voice, Obi comments aptly on the nature of this absurdity, saying that he “listened to all this in silence, marvelling at this fifty-year-old child who hid away from the world that had beaten him in fantasy

houses of his own construction, the way, as a child, [he, Obi] had escaped from the tedium of life around [him] by converting [himself] into Captain Darkie, a character in one of [his] boys' comics..." (25). Here, just as migrants inspire hope for a better future, to achieve synchronicity, the migrant again creates his or her own fantasies as a means of masking the harsh picture presented by reality.

In addition, as a means of adapting to the social convention in the diaspora, the African migrant practices individualism but feigns concern for fellow brother migrant as a conscious means of demonstrating the communal spirit, even after substituting communalism with the former. This usually occurs when a place like America turns the world of the migrant upside down with repressive ethnocentrism, and the African migrant that is affected has no choice but to adjust. In demonstrating this in *A Squatter's Tale*, the author in one instance presents readers once again with Uncle Happiness who pleads with Obi to manage his decaying house in America for a little while, that everything would soon be all right. Yet when Obi moves out of his apartment and calls to inform him, instead of feeling hurt, Uncle Happiness sounds rather happy that he has left. In describing the nature of the pretence, Obi in his narrative voice explains that "[t]he elements of his fantasies [Uncle Happiness'] were apparently quite easy to re-arrange; perhaps if [he'd] told him [he] now lived in the street, he might have cheerfully said, please manage the pavements for a while, everything will soon be all right, and so on" (26).

This pretence as it affects the behaviour and expected standard of the African is a factor springing in postcolonialism. As highlighted by Selden et al., "Models of Western thought have dominated world culture, marginalizing or excluding non-Western traditions and forms of cultural life..." (218-219). To adapt, the migrant is forced to practise individualism, but at the same time feigns concern for fellow brother migrant as a conscious means of demonstrating the communal spirit. Sonn gives a valid explanation for this in his study of immigrant adaptation process through a sense of community. According to him, "individuals and groups may not always respond in negative ways and instead may adapt social and support systems based on the home culture to the new culture. The adaptation of these social and support systems are central to the settlement process and provides the context for the experience of belonging and identification" (2-3). As seen here, what makes these social and support systems central to the settlement process is the need to encourage synchronicity. And adopting individualism and feigning communalism for fellow

brother migrants by practicing it minimally provides the context for the experience of belonging and identification with a new culture.

This also leads us to identificatory integration. In it, the migrant finds solidarity among the marginalised and miserable brother migrant to be very depressing, but considers it absolutely pleasing in knowing a fellow migrant that lives in the community of the very comfortable, and thus identifies with such a migrant. This s/he does to avoid asynchronicity. Associating with an affluent person that is a migrant like them is a potent means of keeping alive their hopes of succeeding. In *A Squatter's Tale*, Obi is very pleased and proud of himself for knowing Ego and her husband Ezendu, “whose house dwarfed and looked down on the other affluent houses” (121) inside the white community of the very comfortable. Again, his pride is boosted with the fact that a house of this magnitude belongs to a countryman, Ezendu. Another reason for this morale boosting is the fact that Ezendu, who is a doctor in the United States, has structural integration. In addition, as David Cox observes, “Within the familiar surroundings of the ethnic group, the immigrant or minority group member will usually find acceptance, common interests, opportunities to give and receive and a sense of belonging” (147).

According to the “Common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union” outlined in 2004, “The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration” (qtd. in Pavl 3). Ezendu’s formal hosting of a local Republican politician in America where he offers his support and that of his fellow brother migrants is geared towards this purpose. For their support, he, Ezendu, presents their request which includes integration policies and measures that would benefit him and his brother migrants collectively as an organization. In line with this, Sonn avers that socializing settings provide migrants “with opportunities to meet social and psychological needs” serving both protective and integrative functions (6-7). Also, Sonn and Fisher have shown that settings within minority groups play a central role in providing people, including migrants, with opportunities for social engagement and identity development. They mention these settings to include church groups, sporting and social organizations, and other similar networks that provide opportunities for migrants to experience security, stability, belongingness, acceptance, and equality (social integration). The central role of providing migrants with opportunities for social engagement and identity development and the experience of

security, stability, belongingness, acceptance and equality that come from these settings make up the protective and integrative functions culminating in synchronicity.

Since synchronicity houses the idea of the migrant blending pleasantly, one motivation on the part of the migrant becomes the need to gain complete acceptance. While in the diaspora, some misguided Africans in their bid to gain this sense of complete acceptance free themselves from adherence to their cultural ways and adapt strictly to the cultural ways in the West as though superior to theirs. This wilful act ironically places such Africans under the condition of the colonised, but the irony however lies in the fact that it is a form of colonisation that is not forced but wilful. In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, this colonialism of the mind is seen to affect the character, Aunt Fostalina. In her conscious desire to get accepted in America every possible way, she considers a skinny frame that is acceptably American to be far better than looking well-fed, and in the process she firmly ignores the concern of her husband, Uncle Kojo. As she exercises in front of the television, Uncle Kojo tries to free her from this wilful colonialism by telling her that the women on television that she is imitating are not even African which should actually tell her something. Still adamant, Fostalina goes on moving and counting to the direction on TV and Uncle Kojo in a bid to decolonise her mind explains explicitly that there is nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, and no buttocks.

The need for decolonising Fostalina's mind becomes urgently crucial when she decides on going on a fruit diet and this comes just after she stops cooking for her husband. As alternative, she stuffs the fridge with groceries for his eating delight. Kojo begins to feel that Fostalina is somehow alienated from the expected ideals of an African, particularly of a wife. In trying once again to decolonise her mind, he speaks for his country, Ghana, if by chance she feels these ideals are no longer practised by Africans. Fostalina is from Zimbabwe but he speaks to her like a foreign woman and tells her that "in [his] country, wives actually cook hot meals every day for their husbands and children. And not only that, [he tells her] they actually also do laundry and iron and keep the house clean and everything" (155-156). He tells her this as though sharing fresh knowledge with her. This is the extent to which the African having a colonialism of the mind to achieve synchronicity has to be taken in order to be decolonised mentally. It is like a system of rebirth, like being born an African all over again and given the mental orientation of what it is to be African. This is postcolonial discourse reflected by the author and it is set towards questioning the legacies of colonialism as it affects the migrant.

Since “Models of Western thought (derived, for example, from Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) or of literature (Homer, Dante, Flaubert, T. S. Eliot) have dominated world culture, marginalizing or excluding non-Western traditions and forms of cultural life and expression” (Selden et al. 218-219), the African when in the West has no choice but to modify his cultural conduct to conform to this standard. This is the case seen in a wedding episode in *We Need New Names*. The marriage is between a young man from Zimbabwe and an American woman. When it gets to reading the messages from home, one of the groom’s friends reads the message in their local dialect and another interprets for the white people. The first message is from the groom’s grandmother and as the interpreter interprets, he leaves out expectations like a wife who would revive the ancestral home and teach the grandsons their beautiful culture. He also leaves out expectations like a wife who would be quick on her feet and hardworking as well as obeying her husband (172). Omitting these African cultural expectations to the hearing of the American audience is part and parcel of the forced need on the shoulders of the African migrant to modify his or her cultural expression to conform to the tolerated standard of the West so as to achieve synchronicity.

Looking further on this need, the American child is seen to have deep scorn for adult impulse to place limits on their world (that is, children’s). This is something the African migrant, who is not used to seeing children live life intelligently like adults, discovers. And so an African migrant essentially has to adjust by accommodating this reality. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Naomi, who happens to be eleven, comes into Stephanos’ store strapped with books she plans to read on her Christmas break. As she opens her bag and pulls out the half-dozen books she had picked up from the local library, Stephanos observes that she apparently went exclusively for size. But then she is not deterred by how voluminous the books are. The books she had picked have intriguing titles like: *The Education of Henry Adams*, *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, *The Brothers Karamazou*, *Plants and Animals of the Western Hemisphere*, and *An Atlas of the Modern World*. And they all seem to have a basic function of broadening knowledge. Stephanos, not used to seeing a child show interest in books of this nature, tries overcoming his surprise by questioning her on what she plans doing with the books. “Reading them,” she answers. Stephanos, still surprised, questions her further: “Even the dictionary and atlas?” At this point the writer says Naomi shakes her head and rolls her eyes at him. Stephanos recognises the look so

well as her scorn for his silly questions. According to him, had she been able to explain her derision, he's sure it would have had something to do with his adult impulse to place limits on her world (89). This is something the African migrant has no choice but to put in check to avoid offending the American child.

In fulfilling their need to achieve synchronicity, African migrants must understand that the American child uses curiosity not just to showcase innocence (like the African child would do), but also to demonstrate intelligence by expressing original views and opinions of how they perceive things. Moreover, one discovers something else about the American child, which is reflected in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. While the African child takes after his parents in looks and in terms of learning his mother tongue from them, the American child on his part biologically takes his parents' looks, learns from them the English language but goes further to adopt a mastery of his parents' wisdom, together with the mature way his parents think and view things. He adopts this as though it were an extension of his mother tongue and not something like cultural values he needs to consciously imbibe. Constant interaction between American parents and their child even from the early years of childhood development makes this possible. These are amply portrayed in Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*.

In the episode where this happens, Stephanos interacts well with Naomi in actually discovering "the beautiful things that Heaven bears." The advantage this has is stated in the 2004 "Common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union," which is that "Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration" (2). It goes on to state that "Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens" (qtd. in Pavl 3). This, among other modes, is an effective means of achieving synchronicity.

Furthermore, African migrants, as they "sir" their way all day without hindrance or reservation just so as to maintain menial jobs, ordinarily prefer that their friends and family do not see them carrying out this form of obeisance for the little they will have to earn. This is so as to remain motivated to work as they achieve synchronicity. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the reader is presented with such a character in the person of Joseph, a migrant from Congo. In America, Joseph already has cognitive integration from attending college classes and registering for courses. "He's been a waiter at the Colonial Grill for over eight years" (94) but his African

friends, Stephanos and Kenneth, have never for once come inside to see him. The reason is that they have been busy to take Joseph seriously on his feigned offer to get them treated as kings if they visit the restaurant during his shift. As fellow migrants, they somehow believe that Joseph would not want them to see him “sir” his way all day for less, even though he insists on their coming. When Stephanos finally goes to see him there to ease off his own tension, their understanding concerning Joseph’s desire in this regard is confirmed. He “spots Joseph from outside as he rushes back to the kitchen with another order waiting on his lips” (173).

Even though Stephanos is still outside and does not hear him “sir” his way through the guests, Joseph on sighting him stands frozen in the middle of the busy restaurant, as though waiting for the ground to open and swallow him in order to hide from the shame he feels. Stephanos pinpoints the reason for this shame as he observes Joseph. He says Joseph barely looks anything like the man he used to know, that is, in terms of now lacking in confidence and his good sense of authority. According to Stephanos, “it’s not just the tuxedo that changes him, it’s the context and the expression on his face” (173). Joseph tries to smile at him “but the look comes across as forced.” The narrator describes it as “a grimace, not a smile, the type of expression you would give to someone whose offensive remark you try to go along with” (173). Stephanos sadly comments on the nature of the gender politicking, saying there is no denying anymore who they are and what they have become. That is, they give themselves a dignified feeling which is a pretentious show of pride to cover up how deep they have been humbled to make ends meet.

The Listening Friendship

For migrants to fit in properly among fellow migrants and achieve synchronicity there are certain roles they have to play. Among them is the role of listener. A migrant comforts him or herself naturally by expressing self in personal stories and, of course, having someone whose loyal duty is to listen. For this purpose, friendships are developed and richly cherished. This type of friendship cherished and preserved as a result of the listener’s loyalty is seen among two migrant characters, Emilia and Hend, in Miral al-Tahawy’s *Brooklyn Heights*. The narrator informs us that Emilia’s easy, undemanding companionship was soothing to Hend, but Emilia on her part grew attached to Hend “because she [Hend] listened to her quietly till the very end, and went along with her [Emilia] to book discussions and lectures” which she [Emilia] is fond of. Emilia values Hend

for fulfilling these roles because her husband hates going out. And, according to the writer, “He worshipped peace and quiet and so he never gave Emilia the chance to open her mouth” (42). There is no person for Emilia to share her disillusioned thoughts with. And so a need for such a person becomes imperative, because for the migrant, when faced with disillusionment the healing process begins in sharing one’s story and having a dedicated listener who necessarily does not have to comment but listen. In serving as a listening friend, Heng engages in social integration. According to Bosswick and Heckmann, social integration includes “the creation of relationships among individuals... It is the result of the conscious and motivated interaction and cooperation of individuals and groups” (2).

Migrants consciously need listening friends to help them in the preservation of their narratives of home for fear that they would forget these memories in the long run while adjusting to the new life in the diaspora, in their conscious desire to achieve synchronicity. Moreover, they need these people to help them get over the distress they feel when recalling their stories. And they want these people to help them overcome loneliness by listening to them speak what is in their hearts and recall their memories. Through recall, an oral narrative stored in memory lingers fresh in one’s mind and is preserved that way. In *Brooklyn Heights*, Heng on her part derives joy making listeners of the people she meets in America and tells them her stories of home. Thus through these listening friends, she creates a social and support network. As aptly explained by Sonn, “Social and support networks and systems can contribute to psychological wellbeing and improved quality of life through a main or direct effect and as a stress buffering mechanism” (7). The social and support network had the direct effect of helping Heng achieve a psychological wellbeing and improved quality of life as a stress buffering mechanism.

Making the Feeling of Migrating Tolerable

A migrant’s lover left in the country from which he migrates has the role of making the feeling of migration tolerable for the migrant. Through the help of the telephone she softens his heart from the sadness he feels when missing home and when gripped with the disillusioned feeling that the better self he has come to find overseas is not within his reach as he had hoped. Exactly this is seen in *A Squatter’s Tale* where the telephone is perceived as an efficient tool in smoothening the migrant’s lover’s role in this regard. While squatting at a friend’s place in America, Obi decides to

call his home city, Lagos, when he begins to feel uncomfortable. The first person he calls to cool his nerve is his girlfriend, Robo. On answering the phone, she sounds sleepy at first but as she hears his voice she gives “a heart-warming yell of delight” which pleases him. While writing this in his tale, Obi comments that he’s struck by how different his experiences of leaving Nigeria would have been if the telephone had not been invented. He says the telephone simultaneously reduced the distance between the exile and the homeland even as it increases the pain of separation (32). Reading Obi’s remark it is obvious that it is his girlfriend, Robo, that makes him feel that his experiences of leaving Nigeria would be different without the telephone; that is, without him talking to her, and she calming his tensions. Obi tells her about the disappointments he experiences and she softly calms him down. The role of the migrant’s girlfriend back home is therefore suitably explained as that of an emotional confidant. With a calm mind arising as a result, the migrant is therefore well disposed to forge ahead in the task of achieving synchronicity.

Overcoming Disillusionment

Migrants go on struggling even after they have been gripped by disillusionment because of a strong desire to provide a better life for their children or family back home. In line with this, the migrant is not just a provider but one who acts a destiny reshaper, making it a conscious duty to ensure that the children’s future does not turn out as bleak and hopeless as his or hers. So even after being presented with the reality of disillusionment, s/he goes on living and working hard because now s/he has to invest in his or her generation with the remaining hope that through the children or kin, their lineage would have the better life s/he had dreamed of having. In *A Squatter’s Tale*, as Obi works night shift as a security guard in America, he meets Fung, a Chinese migrant of about sixty. The narrator mentions that “Fung’s health was showing signs of wear: he’d been treated for kidney problems and he wouldn’t have minded dying right away except that his two youngest children were doing well in school and he wanted to be able to go on supporting them.” For this reason Fung struggled every month to pay his ever increasing rent, things to be bought for the children and utility bills that are said to arrive with unpleasant punctuality (60). The reason Fung would not have minded dying right away is obviously because he is disillusioned in having been unable to live the kind of life he would have wanted. However, he struggles to secure

his children's future, which is his motivation for remaining alive with courage. With this, he achieves synchronicity and is able to fit in properly despite his health challenge.

Another thing worthy of note in this episode is the bridging ties created by Obi and Fung as they work night shift. As pointed out by Miranda Vervoort and Jaco Dagevos, bridging ties are important for integration because they provide almost unique opportunities for upward social mobility amongst migrants as well as increasing tolerance and reducing prejudice amongst majority citizens (620).

Romance as a Means of Adaptation

Since most migrants lived at the poverty line, to achieve synchronicity, they have to provide love from virtues like treating people nicely, being considered sweet, co-operative and soft-spoken, which having been humbled by poverty they now possess. If luck catches up with them as is usually the case, they meet a rich person of the opposite sex living a comfortable life but deficient in love. In such company, if the migrant does not feel so much insecure to refuse to play along, being rewarded with riches then becomes his payment for providing love as genuinely as possible. In *A Squatter's Tale*, this is the kind of luck that Obi willingly benefits from. He is matched with Vivian by Ego. Vivian is a Nigerian migrant like Obi, and a rich and successful nurse. However, she is so unlucky and deficient in love all through her dating life, in meeting proud men that mostly cheated on her or did not treat her nicely.

When she meets Obi he sweeps her off her feet immediately by being so nice and gentle and incredibly romantic; all this arising from how well he had been sunk into humility by disillusionment. As Obi provides her with enough love than she could wish for, Vivian shows her appreciation by showering him with expensive gifts and cooking him wonderful international-type meals. Obi, who is not used to this, tries comparing it to how women had loved him in Nigeria. But even as they did, he admits he had not experienced anything approaching this (171). And even though it scares him, he does not jeopardize this new found favour because Vivian is an African migrant like himself and even from the same country. Obi might be scared, but he certainly cannot be intimidated by his African sister, so he goes on maintaining the role of providing love to Vivian and she continues showering him with gifts without limits. The synchronicity Obi achieves in this episode comes as a result of social integration in establishing love relationship.

Desperate migrants usually seek a Westerner of the opposite sex whose role is to present them with immigration papers in order to achieve synchronicity. To realise their goal, they put aside love and marry the Westerner in no time. To these migrants, looks do not matter, as they are willing to marry even the most hideous-looking Westerner all for their prized goal of getting their papers. In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* one uncovers such sheer display of desperation at a wedding ceremony. The wedding is between an African man, whom the ladies confirm as being handsome, and an American woman, whom the guests are not so eager to declare beautiful because she has an obese condition that looks hideous.

The African man marrying the white woman of this nature puts up a bright smile that is said to never go away. Darling wonders what he's smiling for, why anyone would be smiling with a bride like that (171). But the irony lurked in the smile is that the groom, Dumi, is recurrently smiling for the attainment of his papers, not with his bride as it were. Here synchronicity is realised as a result of social integration formed through marriage relationship. Another name for this type of integration is interactive integration, which according to Bosswick and Heckmann, "means the acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the primary relationships and social networks of the host society" (10). In the novel, Dumi attains such acceptance and inclusion via marriage. "Indicators of interactive integration include social networks, friendships, partnerships, marriages and membership in voluntary organizations" (Bosswick and Heckmann 10).

Asynchronicity as opposed to Synchronicity

Even as migrants try in their conscious disposition to adapt to the ways and standard of life in the West, there are times when they find it difficult to adapt. When this happens, asynchronicity is seen to have taken place as opposed to synchronicity. There is usually a conflict of conduct for the African in the West who has not learnt to modify his or her cultural life and expression to conform to the standard of the West. This is because African culture and Western culture differ in a sharp and striking manner like opposites. So, there is bound to be culture conflict when the African goes out of his or her way to fully practice his or her cultural life and expression in the West. Ironically, it is worthy of note that culture conflict was one of the major themes of modern African literature reflecting colonialism, a conflict examined from the point of view of the African. However, culture conflict is also a major theme of modern African literature in studies in postcolonialism,

when this conflict is examined from the point of view of the West, but this time it is a conflict brought about by the African migrant on the shores of the imperialist.

At the wedding episode in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, Darling, an African girl from Zimbabwe, fresh in America, observes an unruly American child. When he looks at her, she tries like an African to correct and warn him with her eyes. According to the narrator, she gives him "a serious eye that says, You are just too much and you need to stop that nonsense before something happens" (182). The child is American and has not been taught anything about reading eyes. So he unfortunately does not get the message. The child has been throwing a ball at strangers and is left unchecked. This culminates in his throwing the ball at Darling. By the time she sees the ball coming, it has hit her right eye, jabbing the inside. The narrator describes the pain as being severe, and before Darling knows it, she forgets where she is: at a wedding, in America and in a hall full of guests that are mostly American. She grabs the unruly child and gives him three quick slaps followed by two knocks on the head. It is after she has done this that she realises the implication of what she has done, made so particularly remarkable by where she is – America, not Africa.

The white people who observe are horrified. Heads are shaken and eyes widen in disbelief. The entertainer, Tshaka Zulu, desperately tries to quell tensions by urging the people not to be frightened, that it is just how they handled unruly children in their culture. He pleads with them and laughs, but nobody laughs with him or considers it funny. At this point, there is said to be this hot fire of silence. Even though the Americans hear that it is part of African culture to discipline a child, their harsh silence suggests they consider it barbaric (182-183).

To cushion the effects of this culture conflict, the African has no choice but to modify his or her cultural life while in the West, even if it means forcing self to do so. Not doing so, however, is among the forms of asynchronicity observed in the conduct of the African immigrant.

Feelings of Insecurity reducing Self-Esteem

Even though the migrant considers associating with an affluent person that is a fellow migrant a potent means of keeping their hopes of succeeding alive, there are feelings of insecurity that may arise when that affluent person is an American or European foreigner of the opposite sex. And this is so in particular when such a foreigner of the opposite sex is a woman. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Stephanos, who is friends with a young American child, Naomi, from a

divorced home, is on the verge of getting romantically involved with her mother, Judith. As they return from a drive to the Mall during Christmas, Judith invites him to her house for a cup of tea. Inside the house, Stephanos observes two “enormous” boxes of gifts from Naomi’s dad and feels intimidated. Judith in establishing conversation asks him how he likes his presents and he says “small and cheap.” At this point, Judith without thinking hits a chord by telling him it’s too bad; that it seems like he has gone and picked the wrong family. As soon as she said this she catches the defeated look on Stephanos’ face and tries to take it back, apologising and telling him it’s a joke. Stephanos believes her but accepts an insecure fate of not being good enough for her, and, shamefaced, speaks to himself:

...whether or not she meant it with the lightest intentions didn’t matter. I could see myself trying to measure up at family dinners and cocktail parties, and as a result, always falling short. How many times would I have to stare into a mirror and compare myself against Judith? I could go on second-guessing myself forever, and perhaps even find some consolation to the routine, but I saw now that all it would take was one fleeting moment of skepticism on her end to confirm all of my inadequacies, validate all of my doubts, and send me running back to a corner I came from. Our insecurities run far too deep and wide to be easily dismissed, and Judith, without knowing it, had hit that central nerve whose existence I was reluctant to admit, but that when tapped, sent a sudden shock of shame and humiliation beneath which everything else crumbled. (134-135)

Stephanos’ insecure feeling above is unlike Obi’s delightful feeling in *A Squatter’s Tale*, in associating with an affluent person in America. The difference is that Obi feels absolutely comfortable because the affluent person with whom he associates is a fellow migrant. Whereas Obi achieves synchronicity as a result of this, Stephanos on his part develops feelings indicative of asynchronicity. For male migrants who would experience a similar high state of insecurity and inferiority in associating with a foreign native of the female gender, it is advisable to do only that which would keep the hope burning by associating with fellow migrants of the upper and comfortable class. Such caution is needful because in terms of maintaining a stable mind for successful integration, insecurity and feelings of inferiority are dangerous outcomes of postcolonial disillusionment. As observed in the passage, Stephanos sounds like a man who having sabotaged his happiness would contemplate isolation and suicide.

Conclusion

This study has been geared towards demonstrating in African literature the migrant adaptation process. Two concepts for migration studies have been brought forth, namely “synchronicity” and “asynchronicity;” and they both stand for the adaptation divide of either fitting in or finding it hard to adapt. In reflecting relatable experiences of migrants in their selected novel, the authors, comprising Ike Oguine, No Violet Bulawayo, Dinaw Mengestu, and Miral al-Tahawy, have each shown in their novel some of the factors that can help the integrative condition of synchronicity as opposed to asynchronicity. For migrants to break the obstruction of not fitting in, they are in summation advised to stay motivated by every good means possible. Again, it is observed that the migrant has no choice but to modify his or her cultural conduct and expression to conform to the standard of the host society overseas. Further literary studies, in extending this research from this point demonstratively, can be conducted on the role that language has to play in ensuring synchronicity. Although research on the significance of language for the integration of immigrants into host societies has been done in integration studies, as seen in Esser (2006), there is a dearth of it being done demonstratively in terms of literary analysis. Filling the gap from this point would no doubt benefit scholarship in migration studies from the purview of literature.

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