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# Africanity and New Afrodiasporans in America: Negotiating New Identity in Bulawayo's and Mbue's Debut Novels

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**Abstract:** Migratory movements of Africans to the West in recent times have led to the evolvement of the new African diaspora, distinct from the old that emerged in the immediate post-transatlantic slavery era, but with both comparable in number of those involved and scope. Lived experience's implication in new identity construct of migrants leads to this text-based exploration of how first generation male and female African migrants in Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* reflect Africanity. The selected texts, which are depictions of recent African diaspora experience, are analyzed using postcolonial concepts of 'otherness', 'subalternity' and Stuart Hall's notion of 'cultural identity'. The outcome of the relocation of many African migrants to the West is the expression of their Africanity in distinct ways. As postcolonial subjects, contemporary African migrants have found themselves at the 'Centre' where the reality of their racialization and essentialization have grave consequences on their identities thereby rendering them 'unwhole' Africans.

**Keywords:** African Diaspora, Africanity, Centre, Identity, Lived Experience, Migration

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## 1. Introduction

The last four decades have witnessed an upsurge in the number of African citizens moving to parts of Europe, Asia and America. The movements across nations, oceans and continents whose causes are heterogeneous have been subject of studies across fields and expressed in literary forms by both male and female African migrant writers. Individuals who migrate are exposed to experiences that have impacts on their identities with the likelihood of loss of cultural norms and social support system. Adjustment to a new culture and environment are some of the challenges migrants contend with and are also fingered in new identity negotiation. For contemporary African migrants from the sub-Saharan region of the continent, their identities become fraught with colonial legacy and is further compounded by racialization in the host land leading to a state of abjection of many.

Dinash Bhugra and Matthew A. Baker in a 2005 study titled 'Migration, Cultural Bereavement and Cultural Identity' consider migration to be contributing to the richness in diversities of cultures, ethnicities and races in developed countries and at the same time impacting adversely on identities and mental well-being of migrants. While exploring

the interrelationship between migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity, Bhugra and Baker see the interplay of the three having consequences on mental well-being and the concept of self by migrants generally [3]. However, for African migrants of the new diaspora, 'cultural bereavement', which results from loss of social structures, cultural values and self-identity may not adequately capture their realities. This is because many of the migrants in the texts analyzed are seen forming cleavages that substitute for social structures of societies left behind and several aspects of their cultural values tend to be sustained in the host land. The return migration, which is never foreclosed, unlike the situation of those of old African diaspora, eliminates the notion of cultural bereavement, for those who constitute the new.

The need to define the cultural identity, of those who constitute the new African diaspora, a term referring to new migrants, of all categories and classes from Africa, has informed theoretical postulations one of which is Taiye Selasi's 'Afropolitanism'. Her concept describes new generation African migrants, that she conceives as cultural mutts and scions of academics, who have been exposed to different cultures but with ties to places on the African

continent. They are a special breed that she categorizes thus: “We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world” [20]. Selasi’s identity construct of Afropolitanism has received criticism for defining those of her class (the middle-class spectrum) and is not engaged here, owing to its limitation, in defining the broad spectrum, of those, who constitute the new African diaspora. This is more so, as not all contemporary African migrants, fall under Selasi’s middle class spectrum, which Afropolitanism epitomizes. That migration alters identities, of those, who are caught in its web, is incontestable. And for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, their Africanity, reflects inflections, occasioned by their mingling with the culture of the new environment.

## 2. Review of Literature

The term ‘old African diaspora’ exclusively refers to African Americans; those with legacy of slavery, who were forcefully separated from their ancestral homelands. On the other hand, the new African diaspora refers to Africans who have moved away from the home continent in the last four decades owing to economic, political and social reasons or several ‘push and pull’ factors. Studies by Toyin Falola [6], Isidore Okpewho & Nkiru Nzegwu [16], Okpewho et al [17] are largely devoted to differentiating between the old and the new African diaspora and with a focus on experiences of those who constitute the new. In Paul Gilroy’s 1993 influential book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, there is the observation of the privileging of the Atlantic geography in the author’s discourse of the old African diaspora. Paul T. Zeleza [24], who disapproves of Gilroy’s emphasis on the Atlantic geography, considers concentration on the Atlantic point of dispersal as too overreaching, hence his own study identifies some other points and phases [24]. The new African diaspora, it seems, is not devoid of its own specific geographic imprint, as the Mediterranean, has assumed a symbolic route for desperate Africans, who want to emigrate to the West. Because the focus of this study is the new African diaspora, it is safe to say that the many points of dispersal as enumerated by Zeleza are not much of importance here as the reasons, experiences and outcomes of the movements on those who constitute the new African diaspora. The new African diaspora defines contemporary African migrants of all classes with the following peculiarities: those who have moved from ancestral homelands to other places; they are seen to be exhibiting a strong consciousness of the societies left behind; they betray nostalgic feelings about ancestral homeland, and they still maintain contacts with homelands by way of visits and monetary remittances.

The new African diaspora reflects trajectories that see movements of a significant population of Africans of demised colonies to the imperial centres in many instances, while United States of America remains the preferred destination of many. Falola in his 2013 edited book, *The African Diaspora: Slavery, Modernity, and Globalization* observes that contemporary African diaspora is different from

the old one that came into being during the era of transatlantic slave trade. He states categorically that the history of the individuals of the successive waves of migration is not the same although now “homogenized as black people” [5]. This observation attests to slavery and colonialism leaving people of African descent a legacy of essentialization, ‘otherness’ and subalternity. This stark reality makes Stuart Hall to surmise that people of African descent in the New World “belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the ‘Other’ [10]. Aside the commonality of African ancestry of both the old and the new diaspora, they both bear the brunt of racial discrimination. There is the extension of social conditioning of those of old African diaspora arising from slavery experience to contemporary African migrants. People of African descent relocating to the West, are not accorded dignity and suffer restrictions in terms of economic empowerment. As Hall asserts, the Africans of both the old and the new diaspora perpetually remain the ‘Other’ and are made to see and experience themselves as such [10].

Based on the notion that literature gives us the lens with which to view life and lives generally, it is therefore not strange to look at how migrants of African descent, who constitute the new African diaspora are expressing Africanity in their new environment - the objective of this paper. Sandra Ponzanesi’s view that migration represents the most unsettling and yet enriching force of human civilization, and a phenomenon which “has redesigned geopolitical boundaries, economic structures and cultural identities” [19] is very apt and true of African migrants. This is more so as new identities are negotiated by migrants through the processes of assimilation, acculturation and in some instances, resistance. Hall in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, also rightly observes that cultural identity is not a fixed essence that remains unchanged outside history and culture [10], hence the need to begin to view Africanity of translocated people as ever evolving. Some of the reasons for which migrants are compelled to negotiate new identities are captured by Stella Ting-Toomey [22] in a study, where she categorizes them broadly thus: the understanding of social belonging occasioned by migration and translocation; and the need to integrate into the new society. Identity negotiation according to Ting-Toomey is all about migrants’ multifaceted affiliations such as cultural, ethnic, religious, social class, gender, professional, family/relational role; personal images based on self-reflection and other social construction processes [22]. The conclusion drawn from her study and that by other scholars is that identity is never fixed but keeps evolving. Ting-Toomey’s view that “Individuals mostly acquired their composite identity through socio-cultural conditioning process, individual lived experiences, and the repeated intergroup and interpersonal experiences” [22] underscores a distinct identity of new Afrodiasporans. The neologism “Afrodiaspora” is derived from the phrase ‘African diaspora’ and pointing at a distinct identity negotiated as a result of exposure to a new culture.

The new and first-generation African migrants reflect

various home cultures in distinct ways in their new environment based on new experiences and because of their 'otherness' and their subaltern status in the host land. Ting-Toomey [22] identifies ten assumptions in identity negotiation theory, with the following being the ones related to the circumstances of the subjects of this study: (i) that persons tend to experience identity consistency in repeated cultural routines in a familiar environment and they tend to experience identity change and transformation in a new or unfamiliar cultural environment; (ii) that competent identity negotiation process emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural identity-based knowledge, mindfulness, and interaction skills to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively with cultural dissimilar others; (iii) that satisfactory identity negotiation outcome include the feeling of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued; (iv) and that in an accelerated multicultural or multiracial identity formation society – race, ethnicity, religion, social class, and culture – will become increasingly integrative or fragmented focal points for identity negotiation and re-negotiation [22]. These various assumptions for identity negotiation present an understanding of the distinctness of Africanity of those who constitute the new African diaspora.

Inflections and modifications of Africanity and identity of African migrants are hinged on the following: the need to interact with cultural dissimilar others in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment; the need to communicate effectively and appropriately hence the mimicry; the attempt to ensure they are understood, respected and valued; and their continued interactions with kith and kin back home with exhibition of culture of the new environment being considered as disavowal of home culture. The attempt of African migrants to rid themselves of their otherness is also partly to be viewed as responsible for mimicry at several levels (linguistic and cultural). The migrants' Africanity in the new environment is thus expressed in distinct cultural and social peculiarities.

Herman H. Lewis in his 1981 doctoral thesis: 'A Cross-Cultural Study of Identity: Toward a Theory of Africanity', states that "Africanity is expressed through the varied and distinct forms of particular cultural and behavioral characteristics of African peoples" (viii). Lewis' study examines the identity structure of African Americans in comparison with Africans and Caucasians in order to establish a measure of Africanity. He utilizes a series of factor analyses with varimax rotations and regression analysis to support his thesis that African American identity is premised on the psychocultural referent of attitudes, values, behaviors, and beliefs based on the role of African heritage [14]. His quantitative study supports the notion of Africanity as an extended identity. However, while Lewis' variables have proven useful, this effort is qualitative in nature and a literary explication. The objective being to ascertain the vestiges of Africanity of the new African diaspora as expressed in the debut novels of Bulawayo and Mbue using postcolonial terms of 'otherness', 'subalternity' as well as

Hall's notion of 'cultural identity' as analytical terms.

### 3. Africanity in Bulawayo's and Mbue's Novels

It is not uncommon for literary works on diaspora to present individual and group attempts to negotiate new identities for the purpose of belonging. Literature plays a great role in the understanding of culture and the productions by African writers of the new diaspora also express culture in diverse ways. Africanity of the new African diaspora, is one that needs to be investigated independently, of the old diaspora, hence the selection of two novels by new and first generation African migrant writers. Diaspora fiction, which presents the experiences of communities of people dislocated from their ancestral homeland through migration or exile, always explores identities, formed in multiple places in relation to the binary of 'homeland' and 'host land'. It is safe to state clearly, that binary conception of the two locations in terms of opportunities and standard of living, does not necessarily indicate polarity of experiences in the two places. Aside maintaining a strong consciousness of the homeland, there is the retention of some elements of culture, which upon interactions with the host culture produce a distinct new identity referred to by Homi Bhabha as a hybrid one [2]. Hybridity (linguistic and cultural) is often identified in new identity presentation.

The new African diaspora has many African writers both males and females living in Europe and America, who are presenting the experiences of their kith and kin in the Western diaspora in literary productions. Mbue and Bulawayo are part of the exclusive class of writers, who have experienced Africa culturally and educationally, before moving to the West. They are utilizing the opportunity of their proximity to Western publishing houses to write not only about personal experiences, but about their kith and kin both in home countries and their new environment. The two writers are first-generation migrants, whose focus is mainly migrants of their ilk in America. Their novels are part of African diaspora writings with black subjects' representation and with the obvious notion of cultural identity at its core. The justification for selecting female authored novels is mainly because of the roles played by female African migrants as custodians and transferors of African culture in the diaspora. This observation is borne out of the fact that women spend more time with the children in any clime.

Africanity implies cultural identity, which is conceived by Hall as "shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" [10]. In this instance, the shared history of new African diaspora is that of colonization, which many African countries were subjected to in the hands of imperial Europe, an experience which inferiorized them and rendered them as the uncivilized 'Other'. Unfortunately, the narrative has not changed with colonialism being a thing of

the past, as Africans are still treated as the 'other' anywhere they find themselves.

Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* is a novel that chronicles the realities of African migrants just like Adichie's *Americanah*, but unlike the acclaimed, renowned and older novelist's focus on the middle class, the former's is on the representatives of the lower class, the Jongas. *Behold the Dreamers* (BTD) is a debut novel, devoted to the trope and theme of 'the American Dream'. The novel captures the experiences of African migrants and Americans alike, at a period of economic downturn, following the financial meltdown, of the early twenty-first century in the United States, and one with attendant global resonance. Mbue represents the great optimism and possibilities that United States presents to many migrants in BTD, a major reason the country is their desideratum. The paradoxical nature of 'the American Dream' motif, and how it appears illusory in the circumstances of many of the characters in Mbue's novel – Americans and migrants alike, are laid bare. This is more so that all characters in the novel are considered to be striving for one dream or another. The focus, which is on the section set in America, to a great extent, gives an insight into the Africanity of many of the migrants.

Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* is a bildungsroman, that presents the transition of the protagonist, Darling and her friends from childhood in Zimbabwe to her adolescent life and young adulthood in the United States of America. *We Need New Names* (WNNN), though partly deals with migration theme, also delves into maladministration of Zimbabwe by her political class. The novel also presents postcolonial discourse of aids administration by Western NGOs in many African States. The continuous portrayal of the once colonized as the 'other' is one stemming from an arrogant stance of the West; while the conception of Africans as the subaltern renders them powerless owing to racial essentialization and the Western monolithic construct of difference. Bhabha famously articulates identity formation to a similar kind of liminal condition engendered by cultural difference, and consisting of interstitial subjective space, the territory between competing identity structures, that are often imagined in the binary of the mother country and its former colony [2]. The African subjects of the two novels, to some extent, express Africanity in unique ways that are considered subjective outcomes of the environment that they have relocated to. Their identities are no longer considered normal because they are indeed no more 'whole Africans' as they have interacted with dissimilar others in their new environment.

The novelists, despite their newness on the global literary scene, have attracted attention of critics and reviewers. Pier Frassinelli [7] in "Living in Translation: Border, Language and Community in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" places Bulawayo's novel in the league of "the world republic of letters" for winning several awards and for making her work "accessible to non-African readers, but also, unfortunately, contorts the continent's past and present" [7]. Helon Habila [9] views Bulawayo's WNNN as 'performing

Africa' for the global audience because of the seeming harsh portrayal of the part that focuses on life in Zimbabwe. Mbue's BTD, which is the most recent of the two novels, receives a harsh review from Aaron Bady [1] who in Lit Hub brands her protagonist, Jende and his wife, caricatures of the 'good-hearted' and 'ignorant immigrants' as 'the American dream' they strive for translates to total self-abnegation. Irrespective of the opinions of the critics, the focus of this paper is to ascertain the Africanity of the subjects of the two novels.

Hall's notion of cultural identity points to two different positions; there is that which is about shared culture, history and ancestry; the second position recognizes that irrespective of many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference, which is about what we have become [10]. Much more than being, cultural identity indicates, that everything historical undergoes constant transformation. Africanity as expressed by the new African diaspora may not be pointing at a fixed identity but is subject to transformation as a result of intervention of history, which in this instance is migration. This opinion is one buttressing the argument by Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, that when two or more cultures come in contact, there is the evolution of a new hybrid form of the two.

Lewis, earlier cited, in his quantitative research on Africanity among African Americans, utilizes factor analysis of the following parameters: sex role, need for authority and respect, spiritism, communalism, respect for communal knowledge, cosmological unity, humanitarianism, faith and duty as variables [14]. The study is quite robust in the sense that it recognizes that Africanity points at existence of cultural ideals and to Lewis it "represents a way of thinking, feeling, and organizing experience based on the characteristics of African culture, particularly religion and philosophy" [14]. This paper acquiesces to his understanding of Africanity and because of that borrows and modifies some of his variables in the analyses of the two novels, albeit from a qualitative approach. To this end, Africanity will be viewed from the lens of the following features: communalism, spousal roles and relationships, names, spiritualism, language use, and foods. It must be stated that the features by which Africanity of the new African diaspora is measured transcend those discussed here and that while Lewis' focus is on old African diaspora, this effort is on the new African diaspora.

African communalism attests to traditional and rural Africa's past devoid of formal institutions. It gives a philosophical perspective of most of African societies such as: the belief in existence of a mystic force; the use of customary morality; and the administration of her various societies under the authority of elders and ancestors. African communalism ensured a harmonious society which colonialism was seen to have eroded, but despite this observation, communalism, which was the reality of many traditional African societies, had a far-reaching impact on the African people. The societies have continued to manifest themselves in various forms in contemporary times as acknowledged by the African philosopher, Polycarp Ikuenobe

[11]. His argument is that African communalism does not necessarily see a conflict between individuals and community; that they are mutually supportive, and people are required to have the moral attitude of contributing to the community for their own well-being [11]. This is contrary to Olufemi Taiwo's [21] opinion that sees the current conceptions of African communalism as being notorious for their murkiness and thus canvassing for modern philosophies to guide the continent and her peoples in the twenty-first century [21]. Irrespective of Taiwo's position, which is contestable, African communalism, although not clearly defined, has over time and ages, places communal good above personal wellbeing and is seen as thriving among recent African migrants, and as expressed in literary productions of African migrant writers. In the diaspora, African communalism is seen as transcending filial ties and ethnic cleavages, as African migrants always look out for one another.

African communalism plays out in Mbue's and Bulawayo's novels, as migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, irrespective of country of origin or ethnicity, develop a sub-culture by sticking together, while navigating the murky waters of racism and discrimination. In Mbue's *BTD*, the black migrant subjects find solace and comfort in the company of fellow African migrants. Jende Jonga, the protagonist of Mbue's *WNN* has his sojourn in the United States of America facilitated and bankrolled by his cousin, Winston. On getting to America, Winston helps Jende secure the well-paying chauffeur job with a Wall Street executive; he gets him a lawyer that he feels will help with his asylum application and when Jende with his family has to return home, he promises to set up a business in Cameroon for him to manage. The black female migrants of Mbue's novel also manifest communal tendency. Neni, Fatou, Betty and Olu, although, are from different African countries and ethnic backgrounds, form a close-knit unit. Neni, the wife of the protagonist of *BTD* always entrusts Fatou with the care of her children and consults Betty, who has been in America longer than the others, on any thorny issue concerning her family's immigration challenge.

Bulawayo's, *WNN* is not lacking in display of communal spirit as well. Darling, the protagonist has her movement to the United States facilitated by Aunty Fostalina, her mother's twin. Darling strikes a close friendship with Marina, a fellow black female migrant from Nigeria. The two friends find good company in Kristal, an African American, who helps with their integration into their new environment. Aunty Fostalina although portrayed in the novel as adulterous, lives with a fellow black migrant from Ghana, Uncle Kojo. The two adults, who Darling describes as living like a married couple, are actually not "married-married" [4]. Darling in the novel, refers to all Zimbabweans, who come to visit Aunty Fostalina, as uncles and aunties although, they are not blood relations. She declares: "I think the reason they are my relatives now is they are from my country too – it's like the country has become a real family since we are in America, which is not our country" [4]. The gathering of countrymen

always instigates spirit of conviviality.

In the two novels are also revelations of the black migrants sending money to their kith and kin back home. Jende Jonga of Mbue's *BTD* sends money to Cameroon for his father's healthcare and to pay the school fees of his brother's children. The novelist also narrates the unfortunate incident of a friend of Jende, asking him to send money, in order to foot the bill of his cancer-stricken wife. Bulawayo's novel, presents her protagonist, Darling and her family, living in a shack before her migration to the United States. The narrator reveals later in the novel, that Darling's mum and grandma, Mother of Bones now have a decent house in a good neighborhood in the city. In a telephone call with Darling once she is in America, her mum asks her to relay the need for a satellite dish to Aunty Fostalina, who at that time is at work. The obvious assumption is that the cost of the new house has been borne by Aunty Fostalina. The deleterious phenomenon of brain drain, occasioned by migration of Africans, eventually becomes economic gain. The remittances to kith and kin back home by migrants, make a huge impact on their lives and in the economy of home states. Another situation depicting the communality of Africans in the diaspora is the treatment of Tshaka Zulu, a character cast in the mold of a warrior of his land in Bulawayo's *WNN*. Zulu, who loses his mind following his relocation, is cared for by Aunty Fostalina and Darling, even when he is no blood relation of theirs. His will read on his death entrusts Aunty Fostalina with the task of flying home his ashes and burying him in his father's village. This is a task she is unable to carry out in the immediate because of her immigrant status. Pending when she will be able to fulfil Zulu's wishes, his ashes are kept in an urn, in Aunty Fostalina's home.

Names are considered a significant part of people's identity in many African societies. They are a window to ethnic particularity, culture or geographical location. African names reveal information like circumstances, day and time of birth, and are given in honor of ancestors in some instances. There is the understanding, that parents do not just give their children names without several considerations in many traditional African societies. Many first-generation African migrants in Mbue's and Bulawayo's novels retain their African names in America. However, some African names are considered hard to pronounce and viewed as reinforcing unbelonging. By reason of their otherness, some African migrants simply rename themselves, as attested to by the narrator of Bulawayo's novel:

And then our own children were born. We held their American birth certificates tight. We did not name our children after our parents, after ourselves; we feared if we did they would not be able to say their own names, that their friends and teachers would not know how to call them. We gave them names that would make them belong in America, names that did not mean anything to us: Aaron, Josh, Dana, Corey, Jack, Kathleen [4].

This quote is more like a lamentation of loss of self and essence in a new land; the loss of glory and culture passed from generation to generation through names. However,

Mbue's protagonist, Jende and his wife give their American born daughter the native Bakweri name 'AMATIMBA MONYEGI' [15] which means, 'she has returned', a name expressing cultural belief of reincarnation. The Jongas are not ready to mitigate their culture by giving their daughter a fancy American name, so the name is shortened to 'Timba', for ease of pronunciation by everyone.

Through these depictions, it can be gleaned there are different postures to the issue of names; there are those who because of exigencies of the new environment adopt American names and there are those who will want to hold on to their Africanity, wherever they find themselves by sticking to their African names. It is instructive to note that, while some African-Americans, who constitute the old African diaspora, are trying to reconnect to their roots by taking on African names, many of those of the new African diaspora, are doing the exact opposite. They adopt for themselves and their children, names that will help their integration process into host culture and tradition. The two novels though have subjects whose names point to African cultures, heritage and geographical locations.

Spousal roles and relationships in many traditional African societies point to patriarchal hegemony. Paul Kyalo [13] in "A Reflection on the African Traditional Values of Marriage and Sexuality" discusses the underlying value of traditional marriage system in Africa; an institution that he claims goes beyond ceremonies and transactions that commonly mark its inception. Of the three defining aspects of an African marriage presented by Kyalo such as: the transference of a woman's legal right from her kin to her husband; that marriage modifies and ruptures the relations between the bride and her immediate kin; and that marriage is an agreement or contract between two families, the last appears the most defining [13]. This is because many traditional African societies see marriage not only as a relationship between two individuals but also a link between their families. There are thus basic spousal roles, which place the husband as the head of the home in many traditional societies. There is the expectation of permanence of the union, sharing of resources with the husband as the main provider; there are conjugal rights which must be respected and there is expected co-operation of spouses in training of their offspring.

When Africans move to the West, the environment begins to impact negatively on their marriages and spousal roles. An understanding of what African marriage is makes Darling, Bulawayo's protagonist to conclude that her aunty and Uncle Kojo are not married, as there has been no meeting of families and exchange of traditional gifts. Aunty Fostalina's adultery with Eliot, a white man, in the same space she shares with Uncle Kojo, is an eye opener, of what the new environment portends for African marriages and values. While male infidelity is condoned by cultures in African space, female infidelity is frowned at. This accounts for while Darling likens her mother's infidelity to an act of stealing in *WNNN*. Jende and Neni are portrayed by Mbue, as a couple, whose union is a worthy example, of what an African

marriage is, and so is that of Fatou and her husband. Two weeks after Neni and Liomi, their son, join Jende in New York, he takes her to the registry to legalize their union. He also sends money home to pay Neni's bride price and for procurement of traditional gifts for her family, as their culture stipulates. The narrator of *BTD* presents Jende as Neni's "protector and advocate. He made decisions for their family. Sometimes he conferred with her about his decisions. Most times he did what he deemed best. Always she had no choice but to obey" [15]. As a dutiful and obedient wife, she grudgingly acquiesces to her husband's decision for them to return home following the failure of his asylum bid.

African spirituality, according to the renowned religions' scholar, Jacob Olupona, "simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane [18]". In the same interview, Olupona states that for many Africans, religion is a way of life, and it can never be separated from the public sphere. Religion informs everything in traditional African society, including political art, marriage, health, diet, dress, economics, and death. Before the advent of Christianity and Islam in many African societies, belief in deities and ancestors were significant to African cosmology. However, the onslaught of the two imported religions (Christianity and Islam) has not totally rid Africans of traditional religious beliefs.

The belief in ancestors and their link to the world of the living, makes the narrator of Bulawayo's *WNNN* lament the fate that will befall many migrants on their transition. There is the summation that they will arrive the land of the ancestors 'naked', because they have not been present for their own parents' funeral. Many are unable to travel home, for traditional funeral rites, owing to lack of papers. To reinforce the belief in African spirituality, Darling, the protagonist of *WNNN*, is taken to a Vodloza (native doctor or seer), before leaving Zimbabwe for the United States. The Vodloza performs a protection ritual on Darling and gives her a totem. The bone, which is tied around her waist, is to protect her and ward off all evils in her new environment. The character, Tshaka Zulu, possesses a spear and a shield, that he has brought with him to America; the two are traditional items, which are symbols of warfare and prowess in his native Zimbabwe.

The influence of Christianity, is on full display, in Mbue's *BTD* as Neni, the protagonist's wife, finds herself going spiritual in order to find solutions to her family's immigration problem. The church Neni goes is one headed by a female pastor named Natasha, and one reflecting modern family in America. Her husband, Jende, never subscribes to this move as he has made up his mind to return home following the denial of his asylum application. The novelist, by presenting Neni's spiritual quest to the church, establishes the belief in finding spiritual solutions to myriads of problems by Africans. Neni interestingly is never reported visiting or worshipping in a church before the failure of her husband's asylum application. She never gets any reprieve from their impending deportation by her

church visits and her confiding in Pastor Natasha. However, her foray to Judson church, is not totally a futile effort, as the contributions by members form part of the money the family returns to Africa with.

The eclectic use of language in the two novels equally attests to several influences and allegiances one of which is Africanity. In Mbue's and Bulawayo's novels are a mix of language influenced by the new environment and phrases and words in languages of the novelists' homelands. The language of the new Afrodiasporans, as reflected in the selected texts, can be regarded, as potpourri of several influences. As observed by Vytautas Kavolis [12] of migrant or exile writers, the African writers, as well as their subjects, are committed to their native languages against overwhelming pressures in the new environment to give such up [12]. For many migrants the language use becomes unique as they negotiate acceptance and respect of the hosts. Most of the time, many adult migrants impose local linguistic habits on the acquisition of the language or accent of the new environment. As the 'other' and a minority group in host land, migrants attempt imitation of the accent of the new environment, which most of the time, results in absurd outcome. Use of language of homeland by migrants, which is always at their private spaces, ensures home's memory is kept alive. Homi Bhabha's notion, of hybridized language by migrants and colonized people, is one that is relevant to the circumstance of the new Afrodiasporans. However, the education status and location of migrants determine the variety of host land's language that is picked. The educated migrants always imitate the language variant of the educated middle class while their uneducated counterparts settle for the underclass variant or the vernacular that is prevalent around them.

Another cultural trait, that points to Africanity of the new Afrodiasporans, is food. Translocation of migrants presents the possibility of not only new culture and experiences but also new foods because of changes in flora and fauna of the host land. The phenomenon of globalization, has not only facilitated movements of people, but also that of goods and services as well. This ensures, that food items of homeland, are transported to the host land and are available for the consumption of migrants albeit, at great costs. In the two novels under purview, the narrators present situations, where home foods are a rallying point for fraternization of migrants. In Bulawayo's *WNNN*, Zimbabwe natives, whenever they exchange visits, cook home foods, with all of them described as eating voraciously as if they have not eaten all their lives. They are described to "carefully chew, tilting their heads to the side as if the food speaks and they are listening to the taste, and then their faces light up. When they cook home food, even Aunt Fostalina will forget she is on a fruit diet" [4].

Mbue also presents moments when African migrants gather together and indulge in home food. The Jongas are described as a family, whose main food staples in America, are their native ones. However, they also indulge in some American delicacies making their food choices eclectic. In an instance, when the Jongas have the sons of the Edwardses

over on a visit, they entertain them with their native delicacies, which are seen symbolically, as exposing them to their culture and helping them to take it in and appreciate it. Surprisingly, Vince and Mighty Edwards, appreciate the hospitality of the Jongas and look forward to more of the same experience in the future.

## 4. Conclusions

In any clime, culture is indispensably necessary and a significant aspect of the social system. For the African migrants, their relocation to new environments has yielded hybridized Africanity due to exposure to different cultures. Some of the features highlighted, have shown, that Africanity is still ingrained in the consciousness of many African migrants, which points to its enduring nature. Separation from homeland has not diminished the transmission of African culture either at the family or communal levels. It is taken, that as long as African migrants continue to interact with ancestral homelands, they will continue to hold on to ancestral values, beliefs and mores. What cannot be disputed is the idea that their Africanity will yield to influences of cultures they are interacting with and the attendant evolvement of a hybrid variant, that is distinct. Hall's summation could not be truer as "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" [10].

The African consciousness is expressed more among first generation migrants because they have experienced home countries culturally and educationally before relocating. In Mbue's *BTD* and Bulawayo's *WNNN*, the nostalgic feeling of being separated from home by first generation migrants is not displayed by their offspring. Fatou in Mbue's *BTD*, laments that her children, born in America, consider the place as home. Bulawayo through her narrator, also laments the betrayal of Africanity by many offspring of first-generation migrants, who feel no connection to Africa in any way.

## Abbreviations

Imbolo Mbue's Behold the Dreamers (BTD).

NoViolet Bulawayo We Need New Names (WNNN).

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