

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS IN IMBOLO MBUE'S *BEHOLD THE DREAMERS*

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ABSTRACT: The research which entitled as *False Consciousness in Imbolo Mbue's Behold the Dreamers* reports a study of false consciousness found in two main characters. The data are taken from the characters in the novel who pursue their dreams in America as an immigrant. This research aims to find how the characters' false consciousness depicted in the novel. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. This research finds the false consciousness depicted toward the characters in pursuing American dream. The research shows that false consciousness is experienced by the two immigrants to achieve their dreams in America but they are failed to gain material wealth since their belief appears only to have a power to compete others' point of view about their class structure.

Keywords: *False consciousness, american dream, immigrants*

INTRODUCTION

The American dream is a mythic structure; a set of ideals and beliefs in freedom, prosperity and the possibility to achieve goals of becoming rich and to create a perfect and safe environment for families even more for their individual life. For a long time, the American dream has been an ideal for prosperity, not only for Americans but also for people outside America. "Believers in the American dream assume that America is a land of opportunity where, if one is virtuous and works hard, one will achieve wealth and success" (Hochschild: 2005).

American dream is recognized by Americans in several aspects. American dream is a continent in which life is considered to be far better and richer for people especially immigrants with their ability to achieve and pursue their dream

such as material possession, homeownership, lifting up their social status, and so on. It is a dream concept of social order in either man or woman may be regarded by their capability to be recognized for what they are, not from the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

Most immigrants tend to misunderstand the meaning of the American dream so they come and move to America then think that the wealth will just fall from the sky or that they will get rich directly overnight. People all should believe in the hard-work as well and assume that the extraordinary upward journey from poverty to richness, and this circumstance is happening to everyone who is willing to work hard for it and to succeed without complaining.

The fact, the truth is rather different and people often stay disappointed,

especially those who come from different parts of the world to the America just because of all those stories of easily earning money. The American dream is not just coming and earning money, it is rather a lot more. It pledges not only freedom to do whatever people want, but also freedom to start a dream and that dream asks for a risk and sacrifice. Immigrants must not think that they compete for material success is only for being better than others. Furthermore, the false consciousness becomes the reality for immigrants to understand their dream in America.

False consciousness is dangerous since it encourages people, moreover, immigrants who want to gain material wealth to change their structure of social class to think and act through several ways that are counterintuitive to their economic and social self-interests.

As stated above, the researcher conducts the study about the American dream found in Imbolo Mbue's novel entitled *Behold the Dreamers*. The novel is about immigrants who want to take risks to fulfill their dream in America. To seek the happiness in finance in order to break the perception that America is not only for Americans themselves but also for all people in this world. The novel contains of 382 pages and it was published in 2016. The characters inside the novel become the objects to be analyzed and observed by the researcher by relating them to the theme of the novel.

Based on the background stated above, the researcher conducts the problem focuses on answering the question as following; How is the character's false consciousness depicted in the novel?

From the problem stated in the previous paragraph, the researcher relates

the theory to the problem using the ideology and false consciousness from marxist. According to Tyson (2016: 56) American dream is a nonrepressive ideology, acknowledges that it is an ideology. In large part, the middle class is blinded by their belief in the American dream, that financial success is simply by the product of initiative and hard work. Therefore, if some people are poor, it is because they are shiftless and lazy.

According to Tyson (2006: 58) for Marxism, when an ideal functions to mask its own failure, it is a false ideal, or false consciousness, whose real purpose is to promote the interests of those in power. The American dream also tells people what they want to hear: that we are all "as good as" the wealthiest among us. It is not supposed to matter that the wealthy do not think they are as good as others as long as they believe it is true.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research uses descriptive research that means this research concern with collecting data in attempt to describe a subject as accurately as possible. This research also uses qualitative method in order to answer the questions. Frankel and Wallen (1993) defines the qualitative method is the research study that emphasizes the investigation on the quality of relationships, activity, situation, or materials. The researcher conducts this study by analyzing data from its activity and situation of the characters found in the novel of Imbolo Mbue which entitled as *Behold the Dreamers*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Jende and Neni's False Consciousness

American dream is defined as a

heavy emphasis upon economic prosperity and financial security, along with the ambition of finding and pursuing the dreams. America has always been a hope and a promising land that provides a good life for Jende and Neni. America is symbolized as a land of opportunity for everyone who seeks fortunes and a better life in the future. According to Jim Cullen (2004:59), an idea that motivates many immigrants leaving their home-country for settling and struggling in America is their perception of social mobility. This social mobility is defined as the same slogan of American dream 'from rags to riches'. This popular idea has shaped Jende and Neni to conquer America as a land of wealth and become a person that wants to fight against all the bad perception toward them. So, Jende and Neni are interested in pursuing their dreams to become successful by material wealth supported by their self-reliance. From those aspects, the false consciousness of them appears and turns them to fail to achieve their dreams.

Jende's False Consciousness

The traditional American value states that the self-reliance is one of the terms that is followed by American dream. Observing the false consciousness toward Jende through self-reliance in Jende's character is necessary because Jende must take responsibility for himself and it can be seen that from pursuing his dream by his own hand is only because he is triggered by the society in Limbe, Cameroon. Datesman (2016) states that achieving both financial and emotional independence must not be depended on the roots as well as the parents. It means Jende believes that he should take care of himself, solves his problems, and stands on their own two feet.

It can be said that the term from rags to riches is recently widely well-known for immigrants. Jende believes that the term has to be put on his mind. Otherwise, Jende is shaped by the status of his background as a poor man in Limbe, he is unrecognised in his home-country.

“It is nothing like America. I stay in my country, I would have become nothing. I would have remained nothing. My son will grow up and be poor like me, just like I was poor like my father. But in America, sir? I can become something. I can even become a respectable man. My son can become a respectable man.” (Mbue, 2016: 39).

Jende does not want to become like his father who facilitates him nothing, his father cannot send him to school for the higher education background as a man. It is not going to happen to his son in the future. He is going to take the responsibility by struggling his life in America without help by his family or his father. It can be stated that he wants to mask the failure of his background which is determined him as today. He wants to break all the perception about him in Limbe. For he is triggered and insulted by the environment, he decides to go to America without any consideration.

“For you to become somebody, you have to be born somebody first. You do not come from a family with money, forget it. You do not come from a family with a name, forget it. That is just how it is, sir. Someone like me, what can I ever become in a country like Cameroon? I came from

nothing. No name. No money. My father is a poor man. Cameroon has nothing.” (Mbue, 2016: 40).

From the statements above, it can be described that Jende comes from nothing. Nothing he carries in America. To become a respectable man in Limbe that he is not. No name and no money is to show that he is not from a valuable family in Limbe. As the American value of this dream is to take his responsibility to any kind of risks. It is better for Jende to achieve his dream to become a respectable man through his own effort and does not count on anyone.

The failure of understanding the meaning of achieving success is not correctly implemented in a right way. Being encouraged to gain money is only the representation of people’s perception about him. The self-reliance is supported by the emotion of him. The emotional condition of thinking about a completion causes him to belittle the purpose of achieving success, and it turns him close to a place where their dream is almost having its failure.

One of the reasons why immigrants come to America is to have a better life as well as to raise their standard of living. For the vast majority like Jende, this is the most compelling reason for leaving his homeland, Limbe. America is assumed to be a land of plenty where million people could come to seek their fortunes (Hochschild: 2005). Jende realizes that ‘get rich overnight’ is not a phrase that he has to believe because many immigrants suffer terribly also but the majority of them are eventually able to improve upon their standard of living. As it is stated at the quotation below:

Who traveled to America only to return to a future of nothingness in Cameroon after a mere three months? Not young men like him, not people facing a future of poverty and dependency in their own country. (Mbue, 2016: 19).

...

They got there and stayed there until they could return home as conquerors—as green card—or American passport—bearing conquerors with pockets full of dollars and photos of a happy life. (Mbue, 2016: 19)

It is not about how hard immigrants try to seek them, it speaks about when they go back to Cameroon or somewhere in Africa, they do not want to return to their homeland with a future of nothingness. The future of nothingness here means that they do not hold pockets full of dollars which means ‘money’ is everything. That is why immigrants give their effort to avoid their failure to achieve their dream.

The process of making dreams is not really coming from the sincere reason to have a change in immigrants’ life. The failure to mask their own perspective about changing their social structure from a lower class to higher class is written in this novel. Immigrants want to conquer America and go back to their hometown holding pockets full of dollars then showing to the society in their homecountry that they are a real conqueror which means it is close to determining the ideology of American dream that American dream is a belief that people will succeed and possess material wealth as they conquer America. Thus, this kind of ways of thinking is directing to false consciousness.

Furthermore, it is also depicted in Jende that he wants to change the life of his family and the important thing is to show that he is capable of being a man with much money to Neni's father since he is already given a child. Moreover, he is married to Neni with a promise to Neni's father and the certificate of marriage is only made from the city hall in Limbe not from the legal one. Jende supposes that this certificate is not defined him as a married man. Because of the pressure of Neni's father, he is in America now.

"...He refused for me to marry his daughter because he wanted my wife to marry someone with more money. Someone who can give him money whenever he asks for it. But I did not have. What was I supposed to do?" (Mbue, 2016: 43).

...

"Once I come to America and send my father-in-law a nice transfer through Western Union, he sees that maybe I am going to be a rich man one day, he changed his mind." (Mbue, 2016: 46).

Jende's dream is depicted in other's mind. The dream is really implanted in any immigrant's mind. It means that Neni's father indirectly forces Jende to be a rich man one day. Encouraging by the emotional condition of achieving both material and contentment possession is in a one path for reaching his dream in the novel. This pattern must not be created by immigrants if they want to reach their fortunes. Hence, they must be honest to themselves to gain their success.

Immigrants see that the material wealth is reachable in America. The phrase

'from rags to riches' is achievable there. Jende does believe so. Material possession is not easily achieved when a person does not fully motivate himself and does not have hard work to fulfill it. It is needed hard work to go wealthy. Jende's responsibility is in a large numbers. It can be seen when Jende tells Mr. Edwards one of his reasons why America is his destination to seek fortunes.

"...And my son will grow up to be somebody, whenever he wants to be. I believe that anything is possible for anyone who is American. Truly do, sir. And in fact, sir. I hope that one day my son will grow up to be a great man like you." (Mbue, 2016: 46)

The novel describes that Mr. Edwards is a great man, he possess any thing immigrants want to possess. He is a wall street man. His name is widely well-known in America as his wealth. After Jende knows how wealth he is, how Mr. Edwards struggles in America even he is an American. He works hard for his future. The false consciousness plays its part when Jende wants to apply Mr. Edwards' way to collect fortunes here. As in America, Jende places his mindset that the position of Mr. Edwards can be impersonated by every immigrant in order to seek a better life for his son and to even sacrifice his life until it becomes very hard to struggle in America.

Mr. Edwards always teaches Jende to work hard, to see the best in himself, to see the future, and to believe that all will be paid off. Maryane Datesman (2005: 32-33) states that placing a high value on material possessions is called materialism, this is a word that most Americans find offensive.

To say that a person is materialistic is an insult. To Americans, this means that this person values material possessions above all else. Americans do not like to be called a materialistic person because they feel that this unfairly accuses them of loving only material things or only desire to possess money. In fact, most Americans do have other values and ideals. It is stated in Mr. Edwards when he teaches Jende about material possession.

“But everything I have, I worked hard for, and I’m proud of, and I’ll fight to end to persevere it. Because when this life’s good, it’s very good, and the price I pay, that’s just part of it.”

“Very true, sir,” Jende said. (Mbue, 2016: 147)

It can be concluded from Mr. Edwards that Americans have paid a price, however, for their material wealth and hard work. Maryanne Datesman (2016:33) says that only by hard work could these natural resources become material possessions, it will become a more comfortable standard of living. Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for most Americans for the material wealth is a reward for their hard work. That is the lesson that Jende believes with hard work then the material possession will come to him as a reward but placing a power to compete and to be as equal as an American only to prove someone wrong is a big mistake for immigrants.

Supported by the history of America itself that stated by Higgs (1987) blacks are always underestimated by whites in every situation. Blacks are largely illiterate, unskilled, and denied by the equal

protection. This is why immigrants always carry a big matter for them if they decide to live and compete in America to pursue their dreams.

“I don’t know what that’s supposed to mean”

“Everyone wants to come to America, sir. Everyone. To be in this country, sir. To live in this country. AH! It is the greatest thing in the world, Mr. Edwards.” (Mbue, 2016: 39)

People who come to America is not only from whites but also blacks like him, can be in America as well to seek the success. No matter what colors people are, immigrants still have an opportunity in America. Because in America they will not have to live among noble families who possess great power and wealth inherited and accumulated over hundreds of years. America will not promise him to give what he desires as an immigrant, moreover, he is an immigrant with black skin color. Jende argues that succeed is not defined by what colors people’s skin are and how wealth their family is. It is showed in this quotation:

“America has something for everyone, sir. Look at Obama, sir. Who is his mother? Who is his father? They are not big people in this government. They are not governors or senators. In fact, I hear they are dead. And look at Obama today. The man is a black man with no father or mother, trying to be a president over a country!” (Mbue, 2016: 40)

Listening to the statements above, Mr. Edwards keeps shutting his mouth and

does not say anything to Jende or even reply him. As the equal opportunity in America recently becomes reality, immigrants still feel that they are weaker than Americans. That is such mindset of immigrants as they have a memorable history about slavery in America for the slavery is a painful history for Africans. But Jende is trying to accept the reality that in America now, he is given an opportunity by the white without discerning between Americans and Africans.

It can be concluded that from the two quotations above, it shows that Jende always compares A to B, D to E, and so on. He thinks that what he sees one is succeeded, he will be as well. Mentioned by the quotation that is concluded as *Living in America is the greatest thing* is the way too naive for an immigrant like him. He is shaped by people that America is the place that can provide him anything like heaven. He hopes that from the greatest of America will help him lift his social class from lower to higher with its certain purposes.

Many immigrants are hurting and as the pain grows. Many immigrants think that suffering in their old country is bad but here in America is more than they can take. Immigrants have to hurry their dream in America. The American dream is not only about having an opportunity to possess the material success, but learning how to earn and apply the right to both see it and seize it. He loses everything as he stated below:

“...It’s everything that’s happened. I lost my job. My *papier* situation. This work, work, work, all the time. For what? For a little money? How much suffering can a man take in

this world, eh? How much longer...”. (Mbue, 2016: 306)

From the quotation above, it can be concluded that if people only chase the material possession as money becomes the benchmark of the successful life, it is going to have a worse result. The happiness must be followed to access the dreams. The false consciousness is heading Jende because many immigrants think that they can be better than anyone else but they forget about themselves. That being better than other people is way too common to immigrants that to be a respectable man is they have to put themselves upper than others. As the example of Mr. Edwards family, he is a great wall street man, possessing a plenty of money that uncountable. Having a great house that immigrants desires to have instead of living in a house full of cockroaches. However, Mr. Edwards fails to keep his family dandy, he chases for successful by defining the material possession which is earning money to defeat all his wall street competitor is the number one.

Neni’s False Consciousness

However individual must learn to rely on themselves or they must learn to risk losing freedom. In American dream, immigrants must take responsibility for themselves as Americans do. It means that achieving emotional independence from their environment does not depend on how people must be relied on. Neni is used to be in her father’s arguments. She relies herself on his father hands. All the risk that Neni has is her father’s as well.

She wanted to be in control of her own life, and now, clearly, she

wasn't, and simply thinking about the fact that someone else was going to decide the direction of her future was enough to intensify her headache, leave her feeling as if a thousand hammers were banging on her skull. (Mbue, 2016: 63).

Being controlled by people is one of the factors for Neni to gain money and only to show to society, moreover to his father that she is going to make a change for her future. The pressure of his society makes her want to challenge it. As what she understands about America is only many people with 'bourgeois' level will give her much money. That is why she thinks that it is the right time to find her own way to gain material success by landing in America.

Acquiring and maintaining a large number of material possessions is still of great importance to most Americans and immigrants. The quality and quantity of an individual's material possessions become an accepted measure of success and social status. In Neni's way of thinking material possession are not only coming in an easy way, it needs hard work to do so. Neni always thinks of the bad things that can hit her life when it is getting harder to fulfill her dreams in America, but she still encounters it, remains the same as his dreams as she says to Jende in this quotation below:

"We will have our own apartment, two bedrooms. You'll make more money as a chauffeur. I'll make a good pharmacist salary. We won't live in this place full of cockroaches anymore." He looked at her and smiled back and he imagines she believes too. (Mbue, 2016: 30)

As a woman in the motherhood situation, this dream is relative normal. She wants to possess those things. She wants to have an apartment in America in order to live in a higher class than she does in Limbe. She wants to lift up her pride as a pharmacist while Jende puts an effort to feed her family. She is sick of every poor thing she lives in Limbe. Thus, the false consciousness of her is obviously depicted since she only thinks about the richness and the material wealth that she wants is only possessing money and having a luxurious apartment in America.

Jende looks at her and smiles back. She imagines she believes it too, that someday her another dream is she would be a pharmacist in five years maybe seven years from now, but still someday. She also does not forget about Liomi's dream. That is why she tells Liomi that Liomi must be good at school.

Neni also believes that immigrants who have been drawn to America has a chance to succeed here. The hopes and the dreams of many of the immigrants are fulfilled in their new country, here, in America. Learning to have a competition of earning money and possessing luxurious stuff and to compete successfully is part of growing up in the America, and that competition is encouraged by them. Neni takes Liomi at his school, she wonders that now the teacher who teaches Liomi is different than the previous one. When she notices that the accent is way interesting for her to hear.

A faint accent seeping through her warm voice and causing Neni to wonder if she was an immigrant or a child of immigrants. If she was an immigrant, she didn't appear to be a

poor one, or with the dazzling diamond on her finger and the Coach bag on the table. (mbue, 2016: 64)

It can be assumed that from her wondering, Neni starts to think that America is the best place for her. The immigrant like that teacher can possess diamonds or even a branded bag. She can do it as well here in America. There is no border between Americans and immigrants on her mind. The equality of opportunity is real for her after seeing that another immigrant has reached her material possession. This condition is encouraging immigrants to seek their rich in America through this reflection of successfulness situation.

What makes Neni triggered is the wealthy that possessing by other immigrants. She does not want to be beaten by the things that she can do as well. She thinks that they come from the same race, however, she must be as equal as any other immigrants by possessing diamonds, branded bags, and other luxurious stuff. Moreover, an immigrant like Neni does not want to be lower than the same immigrant from the same race like her. Therefore, Neni's false consciousness is following her without even noticing the impact of this ideology.

In the next situation, Neni's dream for Liomi is to become someone who has power, who can be respected by others. This is the reason why Neni puts an effort to do so. Neni gives him advice that his parents do not want to have Liomi as a chauffeur, he must be way better at putting a standard of his dreams since in Africa, the country which they came, their place in life

is determined by the social class into which family they were born as the

“You're going to graduate high school with A grades and go to a good college and become a doctor or a lawyer. You want to become a lawyer like Uncle Winston or a doctor like Dr. Tombias, don't you?” (Mbue, 2016: 67)

Maryanne Datesman (2014) states that the hopes and dreams of many of these early immigrants are obviously fulfilled in their new country. So Neni keeps telling him that it is not going to be like what Liomi supposes to do.

“Me and Papa, we don't want you to ever be a chauffeur. Never we want you to have a chauffeur. Maybe you'll become a big man on Wall Street like Mr. Edwards, eh? That'll make us so happy. But first you must do well in school, okay?” (Mbue, 2016: 68)

It has to be the dreams that Neni and Jende wish for. It is not going to be what Liomi dreams of being a chauffeur like his father. Neni still remains that her son still has an opportunity to become a great man. She still keeps believing that she and her family have a chance in America because for immigrants learning to compete successfully is a part of growing up in America, and competition is encouraged by their strong dreams of achieving success. Mirroring to the teacher in Liomi's school, an immigrant that finds her fortunes in America as a teacher.

Comparing the level of the different social structure from one individual to

another individual like the quotations above is not like *apple to apple* in Neni's ways of thinking. For example, A bourgeois in America is compared to a lower class from outside America such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, or Sudan. Since according to Marx, he sees that false consciousness as a product of an unequal social class system which is controlled by powerful and strong elites, and first it is created by the material relations and conditions of the capitalist system itself. Second, it is built by the ideology of those who control the system. The last, by social institution and how they function in society.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that defining the ideology of American dream is way too hard for immigrants like Jende and Neni. They are forced to move and work in America because of many reasons that complicated and creating many impacts to their process of reaching their dreams. First, Jende is encouraged to live in America just in case to prove people in Cameroon and Neni's father that he can be respected after going back to Limbe, Cameroon. For Neni, America is the greatest thing that she can live to lift up her standard of living, to gain much money, to possess a luxurious apartment, diamonds and rings, or eventhough branded bags. This way of thinking is common for immigrants because of the culture and the condition of their old-life is rather different compared to living in America. Thus, they fail American dream, not American dream fails them. For the false consciousness has been playing its part in their mind since the beginning.

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