



IMMIGRANTS' DIFFICULTIES IN PURSUING THE AMERICAN DREAM PORTRAYED IN IMBOLO MBUE'S *BEHOLD THE DREAMERS* (2016)

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Abstract

As the national ethos of the United States, the American Dream promises a better life for all Americans, including immigrants. Yet, achieving it has not always been easy for them. This research reveals the difficulties that immigrants experience in pursuing the American Dream. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, applying Terry Eagleton's Marxist theory and Jim Cullen's American Dream theory. This research aims to identify the versions of the American Dream that immigrants want to achieve and examine its difficulties stemming from the capitalist economic system. The results of this research found that there are six versions of the American Dream that immigrants want to achieve, including The Puritan Enterprise, Declaration of Independence, Upward Mobility, The Dream of Equality, The Dream of Home Ownership, and The Coast. This research also found that negative aspects of the capitalist economic system, including inequality, exploitation, alienation, and ideological power, become barriers for immigrants in pursuing the American Dream. The irony lies in perceiving the capitalist system as a means to achieve the American Dream, as it paradoxically creates barriers for immigrants. This research concludes that the American Dream does not truly promise a better life for everyone, especially immigrants facing socio-economic disadvantages.

Key words: American Dream, United States, Immigrants, Marxist, Capitalist Economic System

A. INTRODUCTION

The American Dream has been a central concept in American society for decades. It is a belief held by people in the United States, including immigrants. An early definition of the American Dream appeared in James Truslow Adams's book, *The Epic of America*, which stated that "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to

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his ability or achievement.” (Adams, 1931, p. 404). Following this, the phrase rapidly became a common parlance (Cullen, 2003, p. 4). Although people's definitions of the American Dream may vary, the essence remains that every individual willing to work hard can achieve success in the United States.

As the national ethos of the United States, American Dream has provided great hope for the success of American society, including immigrants. Through the promise of prosperity and happiness offered, many immigrants have come to this country over time to improve their lives (Murphy, 2010). The main attraction of the American Dream for immigrants is the comfort that immigrants can achieve in terms of economic advancement (Carballo, 2019). The availability of better jobs compared to their home countries and relatively higher wages are the reasons immigrants decide to migrate to the United States (Gogol, 2023).

The United States is commonly referred to as the ‘nation of immigrants’ due to its immigration history and the enormous number of foreigners living there. According to the Migration Policy Institute, as of 2021, immigrants make up approximately 13.6 percent of the total U.S. population, which is about 45.3 million people (Ward & Batalova, 2023). The large number of immigrants in the United States is driven by the idea of the American Dream. One of the immigrants who have achieved success in the United States is Elon Musk. Through his past struggles, today he has successfully established his famous companies SpaceX, Tesla, SolarCity and Tesla Energy, Neuralink, The Boring Company, and his latest acquisition Twitter (Towey, 2022).

Achieving the American Dream, however, has not always been easy for immigrants. According to Murphy's critical view on Adams's definition of the American Dream, it indicates that from the beginning, this dream was never expected to be fully attainable by all. The word ‘should’ in Adam's definition in the sentence “...*a land in which life should be better and richer...*” indicates that American Dream is never expected to be fully attainable to everyone (Murphy, 2010). In addition, the idea of the American Dream is increasingly being questioned as immigrants realize that achieving the dream is quite complicated. This is due to the fact that the American Dream is not homogeneous and does not apply equally to minorities or immigrants (Carballo, 2019).

Through the economic freedom of capitalism, individuals can achieve the success and happiness promised by the American Dream (Dermo, 2014). Capitalism is seen as a means of achieving the American Dream since it allows individuals to work hard and invest in their future (Grasson, 2012). Capitalism is an economic system shaped by power relations and social structures (Eagleton, 2011). Consequently, immigrants encounter heightened susceptibility to several barriers when pursuing the American Dream, and these barriers are deeply rooted in the capitalist nature of the dream itself.

Behold the Dreamers is a novel that tells the experiences of an immigrant married couple in New York City during the 2008 financial crisis. With great hope and determination, they departed from their home country, Cameroon, and migrated to the United States in pursuit of opportunities for socio-economic advancement. After several years of low-paid work, Jende eventually secured a much better job as a chauffeur for the wealthy Edwards family. Jende realized that he was an

undocumented immigrant, so he fought hard to obtain asylum and later a green card in order to preserve his current well-paying job. Jende's wife, Neni, is determined to become a pharmacist to pursue socio-economic advancement. She came to the United States on a student visa. Unfortunately, this immigrant married couple is always faced with several barriers in pursuing their American Dream.

Behold the Dreamers is a debut novel by Imbolo Mbue. Mbue is an American novelist of Cameroonian descent. She traveled to America in 1998 to study management at Rutgers University, where she graduated in 2002. In 2017, she won the PEN/Faulkner Award for this novel. Interestingly, she is the first African writer to win this award (OBI-YOUNG, 2017). As an immigrant in the United States, Mbue writes her work based on her own experiences.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in discussing what version of the American Dream the immigrant characters are pursuing and how the capitalist economic system barriers them from achieving their version of the American Dream. A Marxist approach will be used to conduct this research. This approach is considered appropriate because the novel raises the issue of the difficulties experienced by immigrants as the working class in pursuing the American dream.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was classified as descriptive qualitative research. It is aimed to provide a deep summary of particular events that people or groups of people have experienced (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). A novel entitled *Behold the Dreamers* written by Imbolo Mbue was used as the object of this research. The data were collected from quotations from the novel *Behold the Dreamers* by Imbolo Mbue. The researcher collected the data by using close reading and a deep understanding of each of the data. After reading the novel, the researcher marked and then collected words, phrases, and sentences that supported the topic of this research based on the research questions. After classifying the data that related to the topic of this research, the researcher then analyzed the data by using the theory that is used in this research. After collecting and analyzing the data, the researcher drew conclusions from the findings. To analyze the data, the researcher used Marxist literary theory and the American Dream.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Immigrants' Desired Version of the American Dream

4.1.1 The Puritan Enterprise

The creation of a society established on moral and religious values is a key component of this version of the dream (Cullen, 2003, p. 34). Neni was initially described as not a church kind of person, but after being in the United States, she became a church kind of person. This change can be seen in the following quotation:

“I don’t care,” Neni said. “I like the place. I’m going to go back.”

“What for? You didn’t even go to church in Limbe. You’re not baptized in any church.”

“So what if I’m not baptized? Didn’t I use to come with you to Mizpah for Christmas and Easter? And didn’t I sometimes go to the Full Gospel near our house?”

“That doesn’t mean you were a church kind of person.”

“Then I’m going to become a church kind of person now. I think it’s good for us to start going to church at a time like this. I was watching on the news the other day about this family that was supposed to be deported and they ran to a church. The church people let them stay in the church—the government could not touch them there.” (p.229)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that after being in the United States, Neni started going to church and became a church kind of person. Neni's change to a more religious person was caused by her family's terrible situation concerning her husband's deportation case, which she said was “...*it’s good for us to start going to church at a time like this. I was watching on the news the other day about this family that was supposed to be deported and they ran to a church. The church people let them stay in the church...*” The mention that the church may provide refuge from the pressures of challenging conditions suggests that the church will be prepared to welcome those who are in need. This is an attempt by the church institution to attract more people to come to church. The purpose is to make more people more religious so that their goal of the afterlife and making the world a better and holier place can be achieved (Cullen, 2003, p. 34). This change in becoming a religious person signifies that the version of the American Dream of the Puritan Enterprise that immigrants want to achieve has been achieved.

4.1.2 Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence articulates an aspirational vision that incorporates notions of individual rights, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. According to Cullen, this shapes the minutiae of daily life and who we marry (Cullen, 2003, p. 38). One of Jende's dreams upon immigrating to the United States is the pursuit of his own happiness through a marriage relationship with Neni Jonga, as evidenced in the following quotation:

“Yes, they can, sir. Everyone can marry, sir. But not everyone can marry the person that they want. My wife’s father, Mr. Edwards, he is a greedy man. 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 didn’t have. What was I supposed to do?” [...] “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.” (p.43)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende managed to realize his right to happiness by marrying Neni after earning enough money in the United States to convince Neni's father. This success can be seen from Jende's words, saying, *“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.”*. The statement *“he sees that maybe I am going to be a rich man one day”* demonstrates that Neni’s father not only believed in Jende, but also believed in the American Dream. The right to whom to marry is part of the American Dream of Declaration of Independence (Cullen, 2003, p. 38). The success in acquiring the right to happiness through marriage signifies the realization of the immigrant desire version of the American Dream, which is the Declaration of Independence.

4.1.3 Upward Mobility

Upward Mobility is described as the pursuit of economic, social, and personal development (Cullen, 2003, p. 8). Jende desires to achieve economic advancement through better job that he hopes to get. Jende's hope to secure this better job can be seen from the following quotation:

“Good morning, please,” he said to the security guard in the lobby when he arrived at Lehman Brothers. “My name is Jende Jonga. I am here for Mr. Edwards. Mr. Clark Edwards.” [...]

Jende shook his head. “No,” he replied without smiling back. “A chauffeur.”

“Right on,” the guard said as he handed him a visitor pass. “Good luck with that.”

This time Jende smiled. “Thank you, my brother,” he said. “I really need all that good luck today.” (p.4)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende has high hopes for this better job opportunity. This is evident from his statement that he needs *“all that good luck”*. A job as a driver at Lehman Brothers would certainly pay well, which is why Jende was so hopeful about the opportunity. The job that pays well will allow immigrants to pursue the dream of improving their economic, social, and personal conditions, as promised by the American Dream's version of Upward Mobility (Cullen, 2003, p. 8).

The American Dream is more than a pursuit for wealth or material things, but also a quest for personal fulfillment and a vision of self-actualization (Adams, 1931, p. 404). Jende's main purpose for leaving his homeland for the United States is to pursue wealth and material things. Jende’s purpose can be seen from the quotation below:

No, people like him did not visit America. 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. Which was why on the day he boarded an Air

France flight from Douala to Newark with a connection in Paris, he was certain he wouldn't see Cameroon again until he had claimed his share of the milk, honey, and liberty flowing in the paradise-for-strivers called America. (p.19)

From the quotation above, it can be revealed that Jende's plan to leave Cameroon for the United States shows his determination to pursue wealth, material things, and personal fulfillment in the United States. Jende's determination is evidenced by the statement that Jende will “*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.*”. The mention of “*as a conqueror*” suggests that Jende is also determined to work very hard in order to achieve the wealth, material things, and personal fulfillment promised by the American Dream. The words “*milk, honey, and liberty flowing in the paradise-for-strivers called America*” are symbolic expression that captures immigrants' dreams and hopes about the United States. The phrase ‘*milk and honey*’ signifies financial success, and ‘*liberty*’ represents freedom and opportunities in the United States. While the phrase ‘*paradise-for-strivers*’ reflects the immigrants belief in the American Dream, they perceived the United States as a paradise for those who work hard and strive for success. Overall, Jende's statements show that his primary purpose in immigrating to the United States was to achieve economic advancement. This is in line with Carballo's statement that the primary version of the American Dream that immigrants want to achieve is the comfort that they can achieve in terms of economic advancement, which is upward mobility (Carballo, 2019).

The pursuit of social advancement is one of the definitions of the American Dream version of Upward Mobility (Cullen, 2003, p. 8). Jende believes that the concept of the American Dream in the United States allows him to improve his social and economic status. This belief can be seen in the following quotation:

Jende thought for a second; he thought about what to say without saying too much. “Because my country is no good, sir,” he said. “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.” (p.39)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende expresses a fundamental belief in the American Dream, which is frequently associated with the concept of upward mobility—achieving a higher social and economic status through hard work and opportunity. The phrase “*I can become something*” captures the essence of upward mobility, implying the possibility of social advancement. Jende's desire to be a ‘*respectable man*’ in the United States emphasizes the social advancement that can be achieved through the American Dream. The United States offers not only economic opportunities but also the possibility of developing social status and respectability. This is in line with the definition of the American Dream version of upward mobility, which centers on pursuing social advancement (Cullen, 2003, p.

8). The opportunities that the American Dream presents are not only accessible to Jende but also hold the potential for his son to have a better life. It can be seen from Jende's statement, "*My son can become a respectable man.*" This shows that in the American Dream concept, each generation of immigrants strives to provide better opportunities for the next generation. The pursuit of social progress is one of the versions of the American Dream that immigrants want to achieve.

4.1.4 The Dream of Equality

The American Dream of Equality is where every individual has equal rights in the eyes of the law and society, regardless of social status or background (Cullen, 2003, p. 105). In the United States, Neni has the right to go to college and is determined to do well in school to realize her dream of becoming a pharmacist. It can be seen in the following quotation:

And for the very first time in her life, she had a dream besides marriage and motherhood: to become a pharmacist like the ones everyone respected in Limbe because they handed out health and happiness in pill bottles. To achieve this dream, she had to do well in school, and she was doing just that—maintaining a B-plus average. Three days a week she went to school and, after classes, walked the school's hallways with her bulky algebra, chemistry, biology, and philosophy textbooks, glowing because she was growing into a learned woman. (p.14)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Neni has a dream to become a pharmacist and is motivated to do well in her studies to achieve it. The sentence "*Three days a week she went to school...*" shows that Neni managed to obtain her rights as a citizen in the public sphere, specifically public education services. According to Cullen, every immigrant has the right to access public spaces in the United States (Cullen, 2003, p. 105). Since education is a public service, every immigrant has the right to education.

4.1.5 The Dream of Home Ownership

The United States has provided opportunities for many people to get a place they can call their own (Cullen, 2003, p. 138). The Dream of Home Ownership is where everyone in the United States deserves to own their own home as a sign of achieving upward mobility (Cullen, 2003, pp. 155). Jende and Neni desire to have a comfortable home as a symbol of their success. Their desire is demonstrated by the following quotation:

She nodded, smiling, amazed, too, at how so much can change in so little time. "We save like that, bébé," she said, "we try really hard, we can save five thousand a year. Ten years, we could have enough money for down payment for a two-bedroom in Mount Vernon or Yonkers." She moved her head closer to his. "Or even New Rochelle." (p.30)

In the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende and Neni are committed to working hard and struggling in order to realize their dream of having a home. Neni's statement, "*we try really hard, we can save five thousand a year*" reflects their

determination to work hard and struggle. Saving five thousand dollars per year shows their struggle for discipline, emphasizing the importance of careful planning and frugality. Careful planning and frugality are important pathways for immigrants to achieve success. According to Cullen, owning a home is a sign of achieving upward mobility (Cullen, 2003, p. 155). It is because the path to homeownership is not easy and requires determination to work hard and struggle, more specifically, it requires a lot of money.

4.1.6 The Coast

The most alluring and dangerous American dream that has become prevalent in the early twenty-first century is the pursuit of the desirable things (Cullen, 2003, p. 9). The Coast is a dream about pursuing several mortal goals, such as wealth, fame, and looks (Cullen, 2003, p. 160). Neni has a desire to improve her looks by buying a make-believe branded bag. This condition can be seen in the following quotation:

“ONE AND A HALF YEARS TODAY,” NENI SAID TO FATOU AS THEY WALKED through Chinatown looking for make-believe Gucci and Versace bags. [...]

They went back and bought it for twenty-five.

“Now you look lika Angeli Joeli,” Fatou said as Neni walked with the bag on her arm, her curly weave flowing behind her.

“Really?” Neni said, tossing her hair.

“What you mean, really? You wanno look lika Angeli Joeli, no?”

Neni threw her head back and giggled. (p.11)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Neni has a desire to improve her looks through make-believe branded bags. The “*make-believe Gucci and Versace bags*” represent the allure of brand names and the association with wealth, status, and lifestyle. It shows how social value is often placed on the possession of luxury goods. Neni also wishes to earn fame by purchasing this branded bag. This is evident in Fatou's question, “*What you mean, really? You wanno look lika Angeli Joeli, no?*”. The desire to improve looks and gain fame is the mortal goal of the American Dream of the Coast (Cullen, 2003, p. 160).

4.2 The Barriers of the Capitalist Economic System to Immigrants Pursuing the American Dream

4.2.1 Inequality

Inequality is natural and inherent in the capitalist economic system (Eagleton, 2011, p. 78). This leads to the disempowerment of the vulnerable and the empowerment of the wealthy, making the majority of humanity to labor, servitude, and misery (Eagleton, 2011, p. 117). When the subprime unit fell apart,

the employees like Jende are threatened with losing their jobs, while the wealthy classes are not. This condition can be seen in the following quotation:

“Ever since the subprime unit fell apart,” Leah went on, flicking the ashes off her cigarette, “everyone’s been nervous like crazy. And I hate being nervous. Life’s much too short.”

[...]

“Oh, everyone’s busy,” Leah said. “But Clark and his friends up there, they don’t have any reason to be nervous. When it’s time to lay off people, do you think they’re the ones who’ll be going? No, honey, it’ll be us, the little people. That’s why some people are already sending out résumés; I don’t blame them. You can’t ever trust these people.” (p.49-50)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that when “*the subprime unit fell apart*”, it would cause an economic crisis and potential job losses for employees. Leah's statement that “*everyone’s been nervous like crazy. And I hate being nervous. Life’s much too short.*” indicates how a sense of fear and threat felt by employees arose from the potential loss of jobs as a result of the chaotic condition of the subprime unit. On the other hand, people from the wealthy class will not feel feared or threatened by this situation. This is shown by Leah's statement, “*But Clark and his friends up there, they don’t have any reason to be nervous*”. This phenomenon demonstrates how inequality inherent in the capitalist economic system leads to the disempowerment of working class (Eagleton, 2011, p. 117). It makes immigrants feel miserable as they worry about losing their jobs and not being able to achieve the American Dream.

The disempowerment and misery of the working class resulting from the wealthy class were also experienced by Jende when he was fired. This difficult situation can be seen in the following quotation:

“I know it’s a horrible time for something like this to happen, with the new baby—”

“Why, sir?” he asked, looking up.

“Why?”

“Yes, sir!” he said. “I want to know why!”

He couldn’t control himself. Anger had defeated the other ninety-nine emotions, and there was no use trying to contain it. The sweat on his palms was no longer of fear but of fury. “Tell me why, sir!” he repeated.

“It’s ... it’s complicated.” (p.251)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende finally had to lose his job as a chauffeur at Lehman Brothers, the job that had been the way for him to achieve the American Dream of upward mobility. Jende's repeated questioning and anger, "*Why, sir?*" "*Why?*" "*Yes, sir!*" "*I want to know why!*" arose from his belief that he had performed his job exceptionally well. This shows how, despite their excellent work, employers as the wealthy class have the power to decide anything over their employees as the working class, including firing them so that they experience misery (Eagleton, 2011, pp. 199-200). The dismissal serves as a barrier resulting from the inherent inequality in the capitalist economic system, eventually hindering immigrants from achieving the American Dream.

4.2.2 Exploitation

Workers, despite diligently contributing their labor to produce goods and services, one social class may possess and control them, enabling capitalists to profit (Eagleton, 2011, p. 37). Jende, who worked as a chauffeur for the wealthy Mr. Edwards, was needed not merely to drive but also to keep Mr. Edward's private information. It can be seen in the following quotation:

"You're going to sign a confidentiality agreement that you'll never say anything about what you hear me say or see me do. Never. To anyone. Absolutely no one. Do you understand?"

"I understand you very clearly, sir."

"Good. I'll treat you right, but you must treat me right first. I'll be your main priority, and when I don't need you, you'll take care of my family. I'm a busy man, so don't expect me to supervise you. You've come to me very highly recommended." (p.8)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende agreed to sign the 'confidentiality agreement' of Mr. Edwards. This is shown by Jende's response, "*I understand you very clearly, sir.*". By signing to this 'confidentiality agreement', it means that Jende had to do his services not only to be a good chauffeur, but also to keep Mr. Edward's personal information from anyone. Keeping confidentiality is not part of a chauffeur's job, but Mr. Edwards, as the wealthy class, has the power to control his employees for his own benefit. This is in line with Eagleton's argument that, despite workers diligently contributing their labor to produce goods and services, one social class may possess and control them, enabling capitalists to profit (Eagleton, 2011, h. 37). The control possessed by the wealthy class over the working class is a form of exploitation resulting from the capitalist economic system, which can become a barrier for immigrants in pursuing the American Dream.

The exploitation of the wealthy class over the working class in the capitalist economic system is also seen when Jende is asked by by Mr. Edwards' wife, Cindy Edwards, to note all of Mr. Edwards' activities. This exploitation can be seen in the following quotation:

“I want you to write in here,” she said, pushing the blue notebook toward him, “everywhere that you drive Clark to. Everyone you see him with. I want you to write everything, in here.”

Jende shifted in his seat and sat upright.

“You don’t have to tell him what I’m asking you to do, okay? This will be between the two of us. Just do as I say. Everything will be all right. You’ll be fine.” (p.191)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende is instructed by Cindy Edwards to note all the activities of her husband Mr. Edwards, as seen in the sentence “*everywhere that you drive Clark to. Everyone you see him with. I want you to write everything, in here.*”. Once again, this instruction is not part of the duties of a driver, but Cindy Edwards, as the wealthy had the power to control the Jende. This instruction also does not provide any benefit to Jende, and only serves the benefit of Cindy Edwards as the wealthy class. Moreover, this instruction contradicts what Mr. Edwards instructed in the confidentiality agreement, which could potentially cause problems. It is evident when Mrs. Edwards tries to convince Jende “*You don’t have to tell him what I’m asking you to do, okay? This will be between the two of us. Just do as I say. Everything will be all right. You’ll be fine.*”. According to Castaneda, exploitation fosters conflicts between social classes and exposes the working class to economic hardships (Castaneda, 2023). The conflict caused by this exploitation then eventually brings up a barrier for immigrants in pursuing the American Dream, which is the possibility of being fired.

4.2.3 Alienation

Alienation arises from the capitalist economic system, where individuals are estranged from their labor, its end product, and their human nature, resulting in a pervasive sense of powerlessness, dissatisfaction, and a loss of control over one's life (Eagleton, 2011, p. 149). The sense of alienation is felt by Jende when he has to work two jobs from early morning until late at night for low wages. This condition can be seen in the following quotation:

The next week, after a series of long restless nights, he got a job washing dishes at two restaurants. One of the restaurants he used to work for, when he first came to New York, back before he got a driver’s license and started driving a cab. On his first day back a colleague told him about an opening at another restaurant in Hell’s Kitchen. He took the subway there right after his shift and got that job, too. With the two jobs, he worked mornings, afternoons, evenings. He worked weekends, too. For six days of the week he left before Liomi woke up and came back after he was in bed. For working all those hours, he got less than half of what he used to make working for Clark Edwards. (p.257)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Jende has to work very hard with two jobs. This was a consequence of his dismissal from his previous job as a driver at Lehman Brothers, as seen in the sentence *“he got less than half of what he used to make working for Clark Edwards.”*. The sentence *“For six days of the week he left before Liomi woke up and came back after he was in bed”* reveals that the long working hours Jende experienced indicate his sacrifice of personal time, resulting in his being estranged from his human nature and loss of control over his life. Jende's sacrifice of personal time in long working hours only earned him a very low salary, as seen in the sentence, *“For working all those hours, he got less than half of what he used to make working for Clark Edwards.”*. It reveals that with the very low salary means that Jende is estranged or alienated from his labor and its end product. Working two jobs with long hours and a low salary, which results in estrangement from humanity, loss of control over life, as well as alienation from labor and its end product, is a manifestation of alienation in the capitalist economic system (Eagleton, 2011, p. 149). These phenomena suggest that immigrants, due to their sense of alienation resulting from the capitalist economic system in the United States, will face barriers in pursuing the American Dream.

Alienation can also lead to health-related problems for the working class, such as burnout, increased strain, and other health symptoms like headaches and nervousness (Chiaburu, Thundiyil, & Wang, 2014). By working two jobs and long hours, Jende began to experience health problem. This health problem can be seen in the following quotation:

Three weeks into the jobs, his feet began to ache. (p.258)

The quotation above shows Jende's physical suffering as a result of two jobs and long working hours. This condition is also part of the alienation that can cause health problems in employees (Chiaburu, Thundiyil, & Wang, 2014). Health problems among the working class, which are a consequence of alienation in capitalism, can certainly become a barrier for immigrants in pursuing the American Dream.

4.2.4 Ideological Power

Some universities in the United States, classified as both educational institutions (superstructure) and significant business enterprises (economic base), not only supply knowledge and degrees but also generate substantial revenue (Eagleton, 2011, p. 150). The expensive fees for pharmacy education at American universities dashed Neni's dreams of becoming a pharmacist. The quotation that follows proves this:

“Pharmacy school is very expensive, Ms. Jonga, and you're an international student. Unless you change your legal status it's going to be hard for you to get loans to get the degree, if you can find a way to get your associate's from BMCC in the first place.” (p.296)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Neni's desire to become a pharmacist is unlikely to come true. The dean's statement that *“I'm sure you know that pretty much every scholarship or grant we offer is for citizens or permanent residents”* makes it evident that Neni was not eligible for a scholarship because she

was an international student. This made her very disappointed because without the scholarship, she could not realize her dream of becoming a pharmacist. In addition, it was difficult for Neni to continue her pharmacy education due to her condition and situation, and the high cost of pharmacy school is a significant barrier that prevents her from pursuing her dream of becoming a pharmacist. This can be seen from the dean's statement that "You have two children, your husband doesn't make enough money, and, by all accounts, you're having a hard time making ends meet. Pharmacy school is very expensive, Ms. Jonga". This is in line with Eagleton's argument that universities not only supply knowledge and degrees, but they also earn big revenue (Eagleton, 2011, p. 150). Universities, functioning as superstructure institutions, often play a role in legitimizing the economic system that benefits the ruling class, a process referred to as ideology (Eagleton, 2011, p. 148). The ideological power resulting from the capitalist economic system can become a barrier for immigrants to progress to the next stages of pursuing the American Dream.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research reveals the difficulties immigrants face in pursuing the American Dream due to the capitalist economic system in the United States. Negative aspects of capitalism including inequality, exploitation, alienation, and ideological power hinder immigrants from achieving the American Dream. This research found six versions of the American Dream: The Puritan Enterprise, Declaration of Independence, Upward Mobility, The Dream of Equality, The Dream of Home Ownership, and The Coast. However, the primary version that immigrants want to achieve, upward mobility, remains unattainable due to the capitalist economic system. Immigrants as the working class often faces limitations imposed by the employer class, highlighting that the American Dream does not truly promise a better life for everyone, especially immigrants facing socio-economic disadvantages. It is ironic that the capitalist economic system, perceived as a means to achieve the American Dream, paradoxically causes barriers that hinder immigrants from realizing this dream.

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