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FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES

STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE

OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

# Immigration and Racial Identity in Chimamanda

## Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

**Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree**

**Candidates:**

**Miss. Hanane BENTAYEB**

**Miss. Meriem LADJAL**

**Supervisor:**

**Mr. Mohammed SENOUSI**

### Board of Examiners

Mrs.Nassima AMIROUCHE	University of M'sila	Chairperson
Mr. Mohammed SENOUSI	University of M'sila	Supervisor
Miss Khaoula REBAHI	University of M'sila	Examiner

**Academic Year: 2017 /2018**

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## **DEDICATIONS**

I dedicate this dissertation to the giants on whose shoulders I have been able to attain this height: my lovely parents, my sisters and brothers. I sincerely thank you all for your immeasurable support, encouragement, and motivation .without all your prayers, I would never have been able to complete this study.

Hanane

I want to dedicate this work to my beloved parents who were always there for me and never let me aside thank you for all the prayers, interest and encouragement. To my precious sisters and my dearest brothers. To my friends who were always such a great support. Thank you all for being part of my life.

Meriem

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation proffers an inside insight into the description of issues such as race, immigration , loss , loneliness , identity and the position of the African in America in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013). It evokes important questions on the nature of racism in the United States of America during the twenty first century. It gives a truthful description of the long history of racial inequality that faces immigrants in host land, the attitudes of whites toward issues such as skin color, hair texture, identity and how these issues still matter in term of beauty and success. The novel selected is thus studied both thematically and stylistically. Literature cannot be detached from historical background; that is why, the first chapter highlights the socio-historical issues and realities that surround and affect the writing of the novel, it draws attention to the theoretical background information relevant to the analysis of the selected novel in order to provide a basis. In the second chapter, we examine ways in which Adichie's novel *Americanah* can help broaden understanding of racism and immigration in the United States. The main objective here is to show that the different racial problems still exist in America because many people still believe the election of the black president erased four hundred years of slavery.

**Key words:** immigration, racism, skin color, hair texture, identity, inferiority complex.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only become black when I came to America.”*

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, *Americanah* (New York: Knopf: 2013), p.288.

During the twentieth first century many Africans are forced to migrate to other countries to escape poverty, political unrest in order to enhance their chance in life however, after their arrival to the US, life never turns smooth as many of them usually anticipate. They suffered from racial discrimination in term of skin color, hair texture and origin because till now most of the white Americans continue having a prejudice against the other races.

Immigration or diaspora literature becomes more popular during the twentieth first century; it associates with the works produced by global dispersed minorities' communities that have a common ancestral homeland and shared the same issues and interests. In their novels portray the different problems that encounter African immigrants. *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is considered to be among them, it is a powerful story about race and immigration across three continents , Ifemelu a beautiful ,self-assured young girl heads for America, where despite her academic success, she is forced to grapple with what is means to be black for the first time. Obinze, a quiet, thoughtful young boy had hoped to join her, but Nigeria during that time is under military dictatorship and people are leaving the country if they can, he instead plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London. Fifteen years later, they reunite in a newly democratic Nigeria, and reunite their passion to each other and to the homeland.

In this dissertation, we are trying to analyse the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah* (2013), in which Adichie provides us with a truthful description of the nature of

race in the US and the attitude of whites toward issues such as immigration, skin color and hair matters.

*Americanah* is a powerful tender story of race and identity by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It was selected as one of the ten Best Books of 2013 by the editors of the *New York Times Book*, she won the *Chicago Tribune* 2013 *Heartland Prize for Fiction*, a *Seattle Best Book*.

Fearless, a towering achievement. From the place of Africans in the race politics in America to love across continents. *Americanah* dares to bring us a world of a confident and self-made woman making her way in these complicated times. This is the Africa of our future, sublime, powerful and the most political of Chimamanda's novel. She continues to blaze the way forward.<sup>1</sup>

This is Adichie's third and most ambitious novel her first, *Purple Hibiscus* (2013), was long listed for the Booker Prize and her second, *Half a Yellow Sun* (2014), won the Orange Prize. A highly acclaimed 2009 collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, cemented her position as one of the most promising African writers of her generation. She was awarded a prestigious MacArthur "Genius" grant and in 2010, the *New Yorker* featured her in its list of the twenty best authors under the age of forty.

The title of the novel refers to the nickname given to Nigerians who move to the US then back to their native soil, taking back with them an array of affectations and snobberies about Nigeria and its differences with the west Ifemelu, the lead protagonist of the novel, is herself an *Americanah*, who travels to the US to study, remaining there for over a decade before returning to her homeland. Against this trajectory, the novel explores the various manifestations of differing cultural values, how one is perceived and how one perceives oneself and collectively, how all are defined by the topic of race. A well-crafted and articulate read, *Americanah* is a pertinent reminder that while racism may be outlawed in Western countries, it is still written into institutional structures as well as outdated private opinion.

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<sup>1</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,(blog), <http://chimamanda.com/blog/> accessed 17.07.2017.

The entire novel builds upon Ifemelu's blog "Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" which gathers a huge following. The blog is about her experience as an outsider in the USA.

Ifemelu's blog is a venue for expressing her experience as an African immigrant and for provoking a conversation about race and migration. *Americanah* is the story of Ifemelu and Obinze who fall in love but their relation soon ends up because Nigeria at that time is under military dictatorship and people are leaving the country if they can. Ifemelu migrates to America on a student visa for university education. She suffers defeats and triumphs. She encounters racism, oppression, alienation, she becomes aware of her blackness upon her arrival to the US and recognizes that race is a significant factor in the US, Meanwhile, Obinze, a thoughtful son of a professor had a hope to join her but he instead migrates to the UK. At first he stays with his friends but later on he turns an illegal immigrant because his visa expires. He encounters racism in which whites display their superiority making him an unwelcome visitor.

When the law enforcers catch up, he opts to return home. After a long time of struggle, Obinze becomes a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, Ifemelu achieves success as a writer of an eye opening blog about race although this success and Ifemelu effort to feel less like an outsider, she begins faking an American accent. She feels triumphant when she can do it, and then feels ashamed and resolves to stop. They decide to return home they reignite their passion and start seeing each other but they break up again and they face the longest decisions of their lives.

Concerning this topic the dominant questions will be: How is beauty, hair texture and skin color connected to the notion of race in the US? Why does Ifemelu decide to return back to Nigeria after fifteen years? Why does Ifemelu fall into traumatic depression? How does Frantz Fanon describe his personal experience of racism? What are the challenges that face

African female immigrants in the West? How could Ifemelu use her blogs to elaborate the experiences of being black in the US?

The reason behind choosing this novel, to show that the different racial problems still exist in the US because many people still believe that the election of the first black president erased four hundred years of slavery .

The selected topic will be studied from three different approaches that seem appropriate to the whole work: post-colonialism, feminism (Post-colonial feminism) and psychoanalytic.

In our attempt to understand racial problems in the US, post-colonial and feminist theories provide us with a different answer to some questions: the problems that encounter African American. The nature of discrimination in term of skin color (white or black), hair texture (braided or straight). It provides us with an answer to a very complicated concept "hybridity."

Post colonialism originally used by historians after the Second World War from 1970 until has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. The term used to signify the political linguistic and cultural experience of countries that were former European colonies. It involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, the theory started with the text of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and led to the development of what come to be called colonial discourse theory in the work of Spivak and Bhabha.

Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of otherness; it includes doubleness, both identity and difference the western concept of the oriental is based, as Abdul Jan Mohamed argues, on the Manichean Allegory (seeing the world as divided into mutually

excluding opposites): if the west is ordered, rational, masculine, and good, then the orient is chaotic, and irrational.

Homi Bhabha is a leading voice in postcolonial studies and is highly influenced by Western poststructuralists, theorists, notably Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Michael Foucault. He also made a major contribution to postcolonial studies by pointing out how there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha uses concepts such as mimicry, hybridity and liminality all influenced by semiotics and Lacanian Psychoanalysis. He is one of the most important thinkers in postcolonial criticism. He has contributed a set of challenging concepts, such as: Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, the Stereotypes, the Uncanny, the Nation, and Otherness to postcolonial theory. All these concepts reflect the colonized people's ways to resist the unsecured power of the colonizer. Bhabha succeeds in showing colonialism's histories and cultures that intrude on the present demanding to transform our understandings of cross-cultural relations. Bhabha states that we should see colonialism as straightforward oppression, domination, violence only but also as a period of complex and varied cultural contact and interaction. His writings bring resources from literary and cultural theory to the study of colonial archives.

Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity. Hybridity refers to the cross breeding of two species by grafting to form a third hybrid species. It introduced by Homi Bhabha, it takes many forms linguistics, cultural, political and racial.

What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance an encounter. Within the area of an utterance between two different linguistic

consciousnesses separated from one another by an epoch.  
By social differences or by some other factors.<sup>2</sup>

Bhabha transformed Bakhtin's intentional hybrid into an active moment to challenge and to resist dominant cultural power, the interaction between indigenous and colonial culture.

In *Americanah*, Adichie provides us with a more accurate representation of the hybridity in her country. Even the term *Americanah* is used to refer to those immigrants who have returned to Nigeria from US and have assimilated some aspects of the US culture. *Americanah* is a modern work of hybridity in itself, Ifemelu, the main character who moves to America for education, has experienced firsthand the combination of two strong cultures and what will be accepted in America and what will not in terms of her background culture in Nigeria. The idea of hybridity is one of the main themes present in this piece and multiple times within the story she has to become comfortable with the middle ground in terms of Nigerian values and American values. Specifically, when it comes to her natural, crazy, African hair American culture is forcing her to use harmful chemicals to make it straight and tamed making it fall out. This makes the idea of hybridity a negative one in the fact that she is being forced to mold her appearance to reflect that of a person with European descent. With Ifemelu's hair falling out, and having to start over and regrow, reflects Ifemelu starting over by immigrating back to Nigeria. Both she and her hair are going back to their roots by pushing aside the idea of hybridity and forcing their kinky, nappy, and beautifully natural hair to become something it is not.

The second literary approach that we shall use is: post colonial Feminism. The latter emerged in response to Western feminism since, white feminists ignored the existence of all non-white women, they focused just on male tyranny, suffrage as if this just the only problem

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<sup>2</sup> Young Robert J C, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 18.

; they excluded black women from their movements because they did not see them equals and did not treat them equals.<sup>3</sup> Hence, it is fallacious to hope postcolonial females to be valued, appreciated and justified by the Western hands.

Most feminists have rejected such ideas of natural difference, agreeing instead with Simone de Beauvoir's celebrated claim that "*One is not born but rather becomes a woman*"<sup>4</sup>so that many of the existing differences between women and men are a socially produced matter of gender rather than a natural quality of sex.

The emergence of postcolonial Feminism is a hopeful discourse that seeks peaceful solutions for all world marginalized women. Postcolonial Feminism as a new feather wishes to bring into light the typicality of problems of women of the Third World nations. They are working to ameliorate the lives of women of postcolonial origin, their prime objective is to make differences (race, class, and setting) regarding women's lives visible and recognizable in the eyes of Western feminists in non-oppressive way also, they seek for balance, mutual respect and harmony.<sup>5</sup>

Post colonial Feminism perspectives tackled many issues concerning women in diasporic communities and women in the Third World .The latter is occupied with similar questions of marginalization , racism , colorism , and hair matters among women of color.

Post colonial Feminism first came into waves .First Wave Feminism focused primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage which represents one of the most fundamental struggles for them ,the right to be educated , and better working conditions.. The Second Wave Feminism emerged in late 1960 which was the longest social movement in the history of the US that focused on abortion. The Third Wave Feminism appeared in mid 1980 this

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3 Hooks Bell, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), pp.9-11.

4 Bryson Valerie, *Gender and the Politics of Time: Feminist Theory and Contemporary Debates* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007), p.52.

5 Mishra Raj Kumar, "Post Colonial Feminism: Looking into within – beyond- to Difference." *International Journal of English and Literature*, Vol. 4, No.13 (2013), pp. 129-134; p.129.

latter was important for the reading of *Americanah* because Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie can be called a Third Wave Feminist.

In our novel, *Americanah* offers a meaningful contribution by portraying a young Nigerian woman facing several gender issues and reacting to stereotypical perceptions of femininity both in her homeland and in her migrant experience in the USA.

In conclusion, Black Feminism's commencement can be considered as the historical outcome of both white suffragettes failure to support African- American women and the empowerment of female colored authors or singers of the Black Woman's Era. Additionally, Black Feminism is triggered and reinforced by American patriarchy's enduring injustice towards females, and white women's persistent racial attitude and insensitivity to the economic survival issues of colored women. As a Second-Wave Colored Feminist, American author Alice Walker terms the concept of black feminism 'womanism' to create an alternative to dominant patriarchal and White Feminist models Alice Walker, a poet and activist, who is mostly known for her award-winning book *The Color Purple*, coined the term Womanist in her 1983 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*. Walker defined a womanist as Womanish, the opposite of girlish being grown up a Black feminist or feminist of color a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non- sexually. <sup>6</sup>

There are other simpler definitions for the term such as the one used by *The American Heritage Dictionary*, which recognized the word in 1993 and defined it as having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the

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<sup>6</sup> Walker Alice, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose* (Minnesota: The Women's Press, 1983), p.xi.

boundaries of race and class; exhibiting feminism that is inclusive especially of Black American Culture.<sup>7</sup>

Womanism is not against the Feminist Movement, as Alice Walker states in her famous quote, it is just a darker shade that included and represented other women's perspectives and voices. *"Womanism is simply another shade of feminism. It helps give visibility to the experience of black women and other women of color who have always been at the forefront of the feminist movement yet marginalized and rendered invisible in historical texts and the media"*<sup>8</sup>

Chimamnda Ngozi Adichie's TED "We Should All Be Feminist" served as an introduction to Chimamanda's particular brand of feminism, she reports in her TED speech "We Should All Be Feminists"; *"I decided to call myself a Happy Feminist"*,<sup>9</sup> her novels mesh her theories with reality, they explore the realms of femininity and masculinity through the lenses of the every woman. The mainstream feminist agenda has neglected the stories and challenges of black women, immigrants and African women for too long because Adichie occupies all these spaces; she brings fresh perspectives to their stories by juxtaposing vulnerability with empowerment in her female characters. In societies and social settings in which these women are often perceived to be oppressed, she makes powerful statements about female agency. Adichie creates worlds in which women can take ownership of their sexual desires in which they are neither defined by their decisions to embrace or reject it.

In this dissertation, we shall use this approach to present the female experience abroad and it will enable us to analyse how the text portrays oppression faced by African immigrants on account of their race and sex. The theory gives voice to Adichie to write back to western

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7 Philips Layli, *The Womanist Reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006),p.xxii.

8 Faterna Hayat, "What is Womanist", *The Progress Pupil* , March 04, 2014.

<https://progressivepupil.wordpress.com/2014/03/04/what-is-a-womanist/> ,accessed 01.08.2017.

9 Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi, *We Should All Be Feminist* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), p. 8.

feminists so as to correct the ill representation of the African woman as 'other' in their eyes and in this case bring out the positive side of the African woman.

In the third literary approach that seems suitable to our dissertation ,we shall use Frantz Fanon *Black Skin White Masks* as a basis for our literary analysis according to Fanon racism, as he experienced it, was a betrayal of the assimilationist ideology of French colonization. Despite his education in the metropolitan capital, he realized that he was nothing more than a black colonial subject constructed to serve the ends of the white colonizers: "*I resolved, he wrote, to assert myself as a black man since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known*".<sup>10</sup>For Fanon, to make oneself known was to remove the white mask of the so called European norms and show one's true face ; a black face, the face of a man who would, like any other man, white or black, reject oppression, pain, , suffering, race and the oppression associated with it.

Frantz Fanon was one of the most influential theorists in postcolonial studies. In his short life, he combined political activism, an interest in race and race relations, and training as a psychiatrist to produce foundational works that described the psychology of colonialism as well as the politics of anti-colonial resistance. He never felt accepted or appreciated as a black man. Ultimately, his experience led him to the belief that the racism deeply embedded in French society created an inferiority complex. He argued that black culture is inferior and thus colonization becomes both necessary and desirable.

Fanon describes this situation in very evocative language, it is an experience in which, depicts an entire history of racial stereotypes and colonial oppression reasserts itself, one in which the black subject feels himself "*sealed into a crushing objecthood*"<sup>11</sup> beneath the white gaze. Here Fanon feels himself radically objectified, imprisoned by his race. His subjectivity, along with his ability to represent or define himself, is dissipated, evaporated, destroyed. He

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<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lan Markman (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p.87.

<sup>11</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 5.

becomes nothing more than a function of his race. He is held responsible for his body, his skin color, his racial history. Hence *'it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me ,victim of an essence, of an appearance for which she or he is not responsible'*.<sup>12</sup>

Fanon describes the struggles of himself, a black man, who is living in a world dominated by white people. In this world the white man is imposing a historical-racial schema upon black people which is based on the color of their skin. This picture, created by what Fanon calls the white man's eyes is coined by stereotypes which roots go far back to the beginnings of colonization.

The black problem for Fanon is the experienced inferiority of black people, which is created by the white society. Fanon himself says, that he was aware and talked about the "black problem" with friends, or, more rarely with American Negroes or blacks but the real burden of being black hit him for the first time, when he became aware of the white man's gaze. He realizes that *"in the white man's world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema."*<sup>13</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote a classic book called *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois used the term double consciousness to help explain the mental conflict that exists for many people of African descent living in North America. Nearly fifty years later, Frantz Fanon published his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* which examined the same issue.

Du Bois defines double consciousness as *"a peculiar sensation this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others .One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro two unreconciled strivings."*<sup>14</sup> Although stated hundred years ago, double consciousness is still a dilemma that African Americans must contend with in this White-dominated society. Most African Americans feel it is safe to say we are all Americans until

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12 Ibid., p. 22.

13 Ibid., p.83.

14 B. Du bois W. E, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p.5.

they experience a rude encounter with racism. In contrast, many may only identify with their blackness and risk being isolated from society and friends.

Fanon touches upon the factors which subtly and gradually bring about an inferiority complex on the side of the colonized subjects and the severe implications this can have on their conception not only of the colonizer, but also of themselves. Fanon believed that the white-dominated society managed to maintain and perpetuate the patterns of subjugation through an all-encompassing propagation of negative racial stereotypes. Under the influence of this hegemonic discourse, the black subject was entrapped in a chain of signifiers which relentlessly depicted him as dirty, and denigrated his traditions as inferior by the so-called superior white culture. The result of this process of inferiorisation is a subalternised figure *“battered down” by the unbearable weight of the demeaning negative stereotypes about the tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships.*<sup>15</sup>

Fanon believed that color-coded racism would ultimately bring about an inferiority complex in black-skinned subjects who found themselves unable to change the discriminatory status. As ultimate agents of power and authority, the white dominators would gradually push blacks into the internalization of the negative stereotypes of their skin color which represented blackness as the symbol of vice and depravity. According to Fanon, this would finally result in blacks’ self-hatred and their ensuing efforts to emulate and behave like powerful whites, a process which he called epidermalization of inferiority. The process of epidermalization is also evident in African American community.

The black subject gradually comes to become conscious of his bodily schema and his blackness, a process which will turn into a negating activity at the end of the day encountering the rhetoric of the civilizing group, experiencing great economic difficulties and being stripped of any local cultural originality, the colonized subject becomes culturally mummified

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15 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 85.

and thus gradually comes to internalize, or epidermalize, the long-imposed notions of white superiority and black inferiority, hence the upcoming of an inferiority complex.

In short, Fanon contends that the white gaze interpolates the black subject as inferior and dirty, and this, in turn, compels the black subject to see himself only through the objectifying contemptuous white gaze. The result is a surrogate body which has no existence prior to the performance of white spectatorship; the black body becomes imprisoned in the white gaze and becomes ontologically pliable.

In this dissertation, we shall use Frantz Fanon's theory to explain how dark skin and African features were a sign of lack of intelligence, ugliness and evil, whereas light skin represented purity, civilization and beauty, all these assumptions about black physical features, as opposed to Eurocentric ideals of beauty have been assimilated by and still have a deep impact in African American and non-white communities in general, and on black women and their self-esteem in particular. Comparing Ifemelu as an object that could be bought and sold. Representing one as an object corresponds with feelings of unworthiness which is a symptom of depression.

Ifemelu migrates to the United States for her higher education. There she has problems adapting to the American way of life; she falls into a depression after a traumatic encounter with the strangers, this psychological disease that most immigrants have because of the mistreatment that faces abroad, the reality of being black in America.

We have structured this work as follows: **Socio-Historical Context and Theoretical Background** of the study in **Chapter 1**, and the study proper of the novels selected in the corpus in **Chapter 2**.

## **CHAPTER 1. SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Literature cannot be detached from historical and social setting for this reason in the first part, we shall highlight the socio-historical issues and realities that surrounded and affected the writing of the novel. The concept of race was created as a classification of human beings with the purpose of giving power to white people and to legitimize the dominance of white people over non-white people, it has been part of the American landscape primarily since the European colonization of North America beginning in the seventeenth century.

In this chapter, we will focus on the important role Chinua Achebe played for Adichie and how he taught her to challenge the Western images of Nigeria and the stereotypes of Africa .In her famous TED Talk “The Danger of Single Story” warns that if we hear only a single story about another country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

Moreover, we will foreground the different characteristics of the Third Generation of Nigerian writers to whom Adichie belongs. The writer is thus keen in giving voice to marginal identities, raising gender issues and breaking taboos, giving a new contemporary interpretation to longstanding themes, engaging with hybridization and multiculturalism, challenging social and literary conventions, presenting a multi-layered, hybrid personality and reflecting national and Nigerian writers.

In the second part of this dissertation, we will spotlight on theoretical background that it is relevant to the subsequence analysis of the novel selected. We will examine Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin White Masks* which offers an insight into these psychological problems that faced people in western societies and what goes through the minds of blacks and whites under the conditions of white rule and the strange effects that have.

## **CHAPTER 2. RACE AND DISCRIMINATION**

In the second chapter ,we will examine the challenges faced by African immigrant in the west "racism, colourism, hairism", the reader is made aware of societal norms that inhibits the lives of young women, and particularly African American or Non-American Black women

in the United States; to be segregated as the members of their own community, discriminated against one another because privileges go merely on the basis of a Eurocentric discourse which prioritizes lighter skin complexions and Western facial features, also it discusses a very important issue that thought to be comprehended at the surface issues of race, issues that affect the daily lives of young black women in the United State.

Furthermore, this chapter is devoted for the causes of immigration to the west, it is the act of arriving in a new country as an immigrant, and it is a global phenomenon that commonly takes place because of the push and the pull factors. *Americanah* can be defined as a migration novel therefore, nearly everything in the story is somehow connected to processes of migration and the different expectations that people made about living and experiencing what they expect to be the real life.

However, one of Adichie's goal in the novel is to show that the American dream can often turn into deceptions for many immigrants and she demonstrated this point through her protagonist, Ifemelu who later falls into traumatic depression.

We will explain the contested concept of identity. It is the most controversial issue in postcolonial time and literature; it emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question. The concept of identity is a complex one. Amine Maalouf in his book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*(2001); he speaks about the issue of identity.

We will shed light on Barack Obama's election; does this represent the fall of racism in the US? Obama plays a particularly crucial role as a character in this novel. It is Barack Obama who holds Ifemelu and Blaine's relationship together; their hope for a United States different. Ifemelu's blogs draw masses of readers everyday with her provocative posts about Obama's family especially his wife with her straight hair. She explains that due to the fact America abides by the white beauty standards, the natural hair of a black female is not always normal because Michelle's appearance would affect her husband's chances in the election.

Although Obama's presidency Adichie demonstrates that racism still exists; it is still dynamic and become more implicit than first even the outlaws of slavery, the end of Jim Crow Laws and the achievement of legal equality but racism is ingrained in the very fabric of American history and politics, and the election of a single black man to a position of power will not change that. It still causes difficulties for minorities.

# CHAPTER 1. SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

## Part One: Socio-Historical Context

Racism is a controversial question throughout American history. From the time of slavery, through the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement till the ninetieth century. It is still an ugly part of American and African past.

### 1. The History of Racism in the U.S.

The problem of racism in America started with the long history of slavery, any study on race in America cannot overlook the importance of slavery as the beginning of some of the evils that still ail the African American community and other non-white minorities in the United States. In 1619 a Dutch ship landed in Jamestown, Virginia, wealthy colonists bought these first slaves for labor. It is estimated that at least 11.8 million people were captured and shipped from Africa to the Americas. Many died during the slave ship voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. About 10 million survived and were sold in the Americas from 1519 to 1867. Nearly one-third of those people went to Brazil, while only about 3.8 percent (391,000) came to North America.<sup>16</sup>

At first, the slaves were treated like servants. They were given the chance to work for their freedom. The wealthy colonists wanted to grow crops they could sell in Europe, these included tobacco, indigo, and rice. Such crops needed large fields; it needed even more labor to work these fields. They used both servants and slaves to grow their crops. Over time colonists worried about losing laborers when servants and slaves earned their freedom. The idea of keeping slaves for life took hold. Slaves could no longer earn their freedom. Colonists believed slavery was acceptable for many reasons. Colonists believed their light skin made

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<sup>16</sup> Worth Richard, *Slavery in the Americas: African Americans during Reconstruction* (New York: Chelsea House, 2006), p.8.

them unfit for hard labor in the sun. Many colonists believed Africans were savages. Then race became a reality, and it was used as a tool to reinforce the inferior status of enslaved Africans brought to America. They depended on these reasons to justify their terrible treatment of slaves.

On July 4, 1776, the British colonies announced in *The Declaration of Independence* that they were free from British rule. This document stated the colonies were a new country, the United States of America. For the next seven years, Americans fought for their independence in the Revolutionary War. In 1783 they defeated the British and were officially free from British rule. After the independence the United States needed to create a new government and the issue of slavery would be addressed, from this moment the struggle for racial inequality took place. Starting from Thomas Jefferson who criticized Great Britain's role in the slave trade in an early draft of *The Declaration of Independence*. He called it a cruel war against human nature. This statement was taken out of the final draft of the document. The ex-slave Frederick Douglass, invited to deliver a Fourth of July Speech in 1852, told his white audience,

The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.<sup>17</sup>

In 1787, the US Constitution was written to become the governing document for the United States. The Constitution did not abolish slavery but it did address another issue relating to slavery. The Constitution declared states would be taxed and represented in Congress according to the number of people living in them. White citizens were counted as one person each. The Constitution stated slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person. This meant African-American slaves were not thought of as equal citizens in legal or

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<sup>17</sup> Zinn Howard, *Declaration of Independence: Cross Examining American Ideology* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1990), p.189.

economic matters. The Constitution also gave Americans the right to reclaim any slaves who had escaped from them. Slaves who ran away to the more accepting states of the North had no guarantee they would be safe. They could be found and returned to their masters. In 1829, free African-American David Walker published the essay *Appeal*. In which he argued that slaves should raise up against their masters. He wrote that the United States belonged to everyone who helped build it and in his pamphlet Walker called for resistance, in 1829 stated:

Let our enemies go on with their butcheries. Never make an attempt to gain our freedom until you see your way clear when that hour arrives and you move, be not afraid or dismayed. They have no more right to hold us in slavery than we have to hold them. Our sufferings will come to an end, in spite of all the Americans this side of eternity. 'Every dog must have its day,' the American's is coming to an end.<sup>18</sup>

Georgia offered money to anyone who would kill David Walker. One summer day in 1830, David Walker was found dead near the doorway of the shop where he sold old clothes. The cause of death was not clear.

In the early 1800s, abolitionists worked to end slavery. They organized a network of safe home in which slaves could hide during their journeys north. This network was named *The Underground Railroads*. Slaves who did not escape resisted slavery in other ways, they slowed down their pace, let crops die on purpose and some broke machinery or pretended sickness. Some slaves organized rebellions Nat Turner was a slave in Virginia, he organized a large slavery revolt in 1831. Nearly eighteen slaves attempted to capture weapons stored in Jerusalem Virginia .The aftermath of this rebellion was nearly as bloody and slaves the area were harshly punished, even if they were not involved in the revolt.

In the North, the antislavery movement was growing. Abolitionists formed antislavery societies. They wrote letters to Congress asking for slavery to be outlawed. Some people even

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18 Howard, *Declaration of Independence*, 192.

stopped purchasing goods made by slaves. Abolitionists held conventions and protests. They wanted to inform people that slavery was wrong on moral, religious, and social grounds.

When the *Fugitive Slave Act* was passed by Congress in 1850, blacks, joined by white friends, took the lead in defying the law, in rescuing captured slaves from courtrooms and police stations. It was one of the most controversial laws ever passed, stated that all fugitive slaves had to be returned to their masters. Additionally, any person who was caught giving shelter, food, or protection to a runaway slave could be subject to up to six months in prison.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln became the sixteenth president of the United States. By this time four million slaves lived in the United States. Lincoln was not an abolitionist when he was elected but he did oppose slavery on moral grounds. He did not want slavery to spread to new territories and states. His election would eventually change the course of slavery in the country.

When Lincoln was elected, tension between the Northern and Southern states was higher. The North and South strongly disagreed about whether the new territories could have slaves or not. Eleven southern states had seceded from the United States, or Union, by 1861. They created their own country called the Confederate States of America, or the Confederacy that wanted each state to be able to make decisions about slavery. They did not think the federal government should decide if a state could have slaves or not.

Tension between the Union and the Confederacy led to the American Civil War in 1861, The North strongly disagreed with the secession of the South. Northern states wanted the country to stay unified and while Southerners felt the North wanted to change their way of life.

In 1863, Lincoln issued *The Emancipation Proclamation*. This order stated slaves in the Confederacy were free. It did not end slavery in the country. But *The Emancipation*

*Proclamation* reminded people the Civil War was a war for freedom. In 1864, Lincoln was re-elected president. He continued to work to end slavery.

In 1865, the Confederacy officially surrendered. It had lost the Civil War. Later that year the *Thirteenth Amendment* was added to the US Constitution. It abolished slavery in all states. The Union had achieved its goals. The nation remained unified. Slavery was outlawed. However, the former slaves were often kept from owning property and did not share the same rights as white Americans. Racist laws and practices kept the status of black Americans low.

The Civil War and Reconstruction created massive upheaval in Southern slave and free black communities. In addition, slave owners were often devastated. African Americans were free, but their freedom was not guaranteed. A century passed before their legal rights were effectively protected and their political participation expanded. The Reverend Martin Luther King's "*I have a dream*": he said he had a dream that "*the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*"<sup>19</sup>

Although African Americans had become free, whites still believed that they should control the lives of black people. Carl Schurz, a politician and a major general in the Union army during the Civil War, travelled to the South during Reconstruction. He wrote:

Wherever I go the street, the shop, the house, the hotel, or the steamboat I hear the people talk in such a way as to indicate that they are unable to conceive of the Negro as possessing any rights at all. Men, who are honorable in their dealings with their white neighbours, will cheat a Negro without feeling a single twinge. To kill a Negro, they do not deem believe it to be murder to take the property away from a Negro, they do not consider robbery.<sup>20</sup>

But with time extraordinary changes in racial attitudes and practices occurred in the Reconstruction decade following the Civil War. Slavery was abolished. The 1866 *Civil Rights Act* and *The Fourteenth Amendment* guaranteed blacks basic civil rights, such as freedom of contract and property ownership also the amendment granted full citizenship to all people

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19 Richard, *Slavery in the Americas*, 12.

20 Richard, *Slavery in the Americas*, 37.

born or naturalized in the United States, including blacks. Although, freedom did not arrive for all black southerners in large cities such as, Virginia some white plantation owners, however, did not notify their former slaves of their freedom until months after the war's end. At first, some freedmen believed that they would be given land on their former masters' plantations under the presidency of Andrew Johnson but he soon crushed such hopes. His May 29, 1865, *Proclamation of Amnesty* pardoned almost all former Confederate soldiers. The law allowed them to take back any lands that might be occupied by African Americans. As a result, the former slaves could leave their plantations, they became poor and landless.

Southern legislatures passed *Black Codes*. These racist laws were designed to restrict the activities of the former slaves. White Southerners were used to being able to keep their slaves in line with laws and threats. *The Black Codes*, set up in the years after the Civil War, would attempt to impose the same limits on the freedmen. *Black Codes* denied African Americans the right to enter schools, theaters, hotels, and other public facilities. *Black Codes* forced freedmen back to plantations. *The South Carolina Law* prohibited black people from taking any job other than agricultural or domestic work, unless they obtained a special license from the local judge.

In 1866, the United States government passed the *Civil Rights Act*. This law gave all citizens rights, regardless of race. Blacks could now make and enforce contracts, own and sell properties, and file lawsuits in court. President Johnson vetoed the bill, but both houses of Congress overrode his veto. It became law. Congress extended the life of a major agency over another Johnson veto. *The Bureau of Refugees*, freedmen abandoned Lands, known as *the Freedmen's Bureau*, tried to ease the transition of former slaves to free life. It provided food, shelter, medical care, and education. The bureau set up more than four thousand schools throughout the South. It also sent hundreds of agents to help blacks find jobs. Despite success in establishing schools, the undermanned *Freedmen's Bureau* was short lived. Few agents had

the ability or knowledge to deal with freedmen's problems. The bureau was disbanded in 1872.<sup>21</sup>

*The Reconstruction Act* of 1867 which divided the South into five military zones, each under a major general. President Johnson vetoed the bill, but Congress once again overrode his veto. Under *The Reconstruction Act*, new elections would be held. Black men could vote in these elections.

In 1865, six young men in Tennessee formed a club called the *Ku Klux Klan*. Southern supporter Claude Bowers claimed, "*The Klan was organized for the protection of women, property, civilization itself.*"<sup>22</sup> Soon, the Tennessee club spread throughout the South; hooded night riders dressed up like ghosts. By 1870, other similar organizations had formed. Raiders burned black schools and churches. They murdered African Americans and their white allies. They threatened blacks who tried to register to vote or demanded civil rights. In 1871, Congress passed the *Ku Klux Klan act*, or *Force Bill*. It gave the president the authority to use federal troops against the Klan. *The Ku Klux Klan* was stopped.

In the late 1800s *Jim Crow Laws* passed greatly limited blacks' freedom. It is a way of life that was full of limitations for African Americans. In some ways, these humiliations were as bad as slavery. These laws separated blacks from whites in public transportation, schools, and hospitals. Even death did not end this segregation. Blacks had separate funeral homes and separate cemeteries.<sup>23</sup>

Life in the South had become worst. Anyone who was born black, no matter how high the person's education or abilities, had fewer rights than the poorest white "*We came to know that whatever we had was always inferior*".<sup>24</sup>

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21 Fremont David K, *The Jim Crow Laws and Racism in American History* (Berkeley: Berkeley Heights, 2000), pp. 12-13.

22 Ibid., p.14.

23 David K, *Racism in American History*, 17.

24 Ibid., p.18.

Southern blacks learned early in life to restrain their ambitions. “*I could never aspire to be President of the United States or governor of my state.*”<sup>25</sup> Author Alben Hosley wrote “*I knew that front doors of white homes in my town were not for me to enter, except as a servant.*”<sup>26</sup>

In 1890 Louisiana statute segregated races on trains. Passengers could enter only those cars assigned to their own race. *The Louisiana Train Law* was not unusual in the South. Blacks and whites had lived in relative harmony in New Orleans. The city had many residents of mixed blood some had owned slaves. *Louisiana’s 1890 Law* posed a threat to the security of these relatively well-off citizens. They decided to fight the act. Louis Martinet, a black lawyer and newspaper man, took action. He gathered sixteen other black Louisianans and established the Citizens Committee to Test the Constitutionality of *the Separate Car Law*.

African Americans knew that education was important. An educated person could make his or her own decisions. An educated farmer could total his accounts at the end of the planting season black education was virtually nonexistent in the South before the Civil War. Most African Americans were slaves. Access to free public education was unknown until after the war. At that time, *the Freedmen’s Bureau* opened schools for blacks. More than four thousand such public schools appeared. Even after the bureau disbanded in 1872, many schools survived. Blacks got their education wherever they could. Any available building might serve as a black school even the discrimination that imposed upon schools.

*The Fifteenth Amendment* enfranchised blacks for the first time in most of the nation. Blacks in most states voted for the first time; restrictions on their legal testimony were removed, and blacks were admitted to public schools which in some states were integrated.

1887-1929 this era was defined by a long war on African-American participation in state and federal politics, waged by means of local southern laws, Jim Crow segregation, between

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25 Ibid., p19.

26 Ibid.

1887 and 1901, just five blacks served in Congress. They faced obstacles included violence, intimidation, and fraud by white supremacists, *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*, founded during this era, tackled issues that were important to the black community. In 1929, African Americans' long exile from Congress ended when Oscar De Priest entered the House, ending a twenty eight years absence of black representatives. De Priest's victory ,he was the first black member from the North ,it marked a new era of black political organization .All thirteen African Americans elected during this era represented northern constituencies, except Senator Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts, were elected from majority black.

Edward W. Brooke's election as a U.S Senate in1966 ended an eighty five years absence of African-American Senators. Brooke was the first popularly elected Senator and the first black politician from Massachusetts to serve in Congress.

In July 2004, Barack Obama becomes a U.S. Senator from Illinois. He is only the fifth African American in congressional history to serve in the U.S. Senate. In 2004, after the Senator Peter Fitzgerald, a Republican, announced his retirement, Obama joined a crowded field of candidates in the Democratic primary for the open seat. He garnered fifty three percent of the vote, topping two favored candidates State Comptroller Daniel Hynes and a wealthy securities trader, Blair Hull .Obama emerged as a national figure during that campaign, delivering a rousing keynote address on the second night of the Democratic National Convention in the summer of 2004, when he dared Americans to have "*the audacity of hope*."<sup>27</sup> He explained, "*It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs*".<sup>28</sup> "*The hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores. The hope of a skinny kid with*

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27 Brady Robert and Vernon Ethlers, *Black Americans in Congress 1870-2007*(Washington: Government Printing Office, 2008), p. 742.

28 Ibid.

*a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.*" Obama won a landslide seventy percent of the vote against Republican candidate.<sup>29</sup>

Many Americans have the mistaken conception of the idea of Africa as it is represented by colonial discourse, that depicts Africa negatively and dismissively in their writing as people dying of poverty, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind white foreigner. Adichie herself fell victim to America's single story, in her famous TED Talk *The Danger of Single Story* warns that if we hear only a single story about another country, we risk a critical misunderstanding and it creates a stereotype for that reason she brings several stories to enlighten and inform about the urgency of the search for knowledge, about the proper understanding of the other.

## **2. The Danger of Single Story**

In 2009 the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a fabulous TED talk called *The Danger of a Single Story*. It was about what happens when complex human beings and situations are reduced to a single narrative, when Africans, for example, are treated solely as pitiable poor, starving victims. Her point was that each individual life contains a heterogeneous compilation of stories. If you reduce people to one, you're taking away their humanity.<sup>30</sup>

Adichie believes in the power of stories, and warns that hearing only one about a people or nation leads to ignorance. She says the truth is revealed by many tales. She illustrates this with a story about coming to the United States, as a middle-class daughter of a professor and an administrator, and meeting her college roommate. Adichie says that her roommate's position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning, pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. Adichie discovered also

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Brooks David, "The Danger of Single Story", *The New York Times* April 19, 2016.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/19/opinion/the-danger-of-a-single-story.html> accessed 09.12.2017.

the story that America and the Western literature told about Africa was of a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals and incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind white foreigner. Adichie also tells how growing up in Nigeria reading only American and English children's books made her deaf to her authentic voice. As a child, she wrote about such things as blue-eyed white children eating apples, thinking brown skin and mangos had no place in literature. That changed as she discovered African writers, particularly the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe.<sup>31</sup>

The Danger of a Single Story, this reductive portrayal of the African continent prevents outsiders from seeing an African as equally human. Consequently, Adichie writes to combat these stereotypes and the single story. In most of her writing, we find characters that are educated, have comfortable lives, do not starve and have cellphones and cars. These traits made them, as seen by some critics, as not authentically African. Again; this breaks the tradition of previous generations of Nigerian writers, such as Chinua Achebe. Adichie insists on portraying the diverse faces of Africa, not just the one that the West is comfortable with: *“Achebe’s characters were nothing like me and lived without the things that I saw as the norm in my life: cars, electricity and telephones.”*<sup>32</sup>

The Danger of a Single Story is a celebrated speech, in which Adichie talks about stories and how they matter. Adichie's main point is that a single story, once released into the public domain, becomes a hegemonic one. The power of a single story is that it can make us believe that the world is as the story tells it, without questioning.

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to

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31 CNN, "The Danger of Single Story", *Ted Talk Tuesday* December 22, 2009. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/OPINION/12/21/ted.talk.adichie.excerpt/index.html> accessed 09.12.2017.

32 Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi, "African Authenticity and the Biafra Experience," *Transition: An International Review*, No.99 (2008), pp.42-53;p.42.

empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.<sup>33</sup> The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story<sup>34</sup>

The writer herself fell victim to America's single story during a trip to Guadalajara, she realized not all Mexicans are scheming criminals trying to hop the border. *"I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind: the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself"*.<sup>35</sup>

During her infancy, her family had domestic workers who were very poor. One of them, Fide, was an eight year old child. Her mother always mentioned Fide as a poor person; when the children of the house did not eat everything on their plates, she would say, don't you know that people like Fide have nothing to eat? Thus, the ultimate catchword for Fide was his poverty and his helplessness. When during a party, Adichie and her family were visiting the boy's home, they found a poor environment, yes, but a cheerful one, and his mother showed them with pride a beautiful basket made by one of her sons. Adichie was astonished because she had never occurred to her that anyone in Fide's family could actually create something. She had a single story about Fide: poverty was his single history.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasises how we are different rather than how we are similar.<sup>36</sup>

Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

She acknowledged the role of Chinua Achebe's *The Things Fall Apart* and considered it as a

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33 Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi, "The Danger of a Single Story". *TED Global* (Jul. 2009)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamandaadichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamandaadichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story) accessed 9.12.2017.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Adichie Chimamanda Ngozi, "The Danger of a Single Story."

point of departure for reflections on authenticity, she read the book when she was eight or nine, and she makes her realize that African literature is worthy and deserved respect.

It was a glorious shock of discovery. Here were characters who had Igbo names and ate yams and inhabited a world similar to mine. Okonkwo and Ezinma and Ikemefuna taught me that my world was worthy of literature.<sup>37</sup>

Chinua Achebe plays an important role in changing Adichie's point of view because at first she believed that the only character that exists in literature are white, had blue eyes, played in the snow, ate apples, and had dogs called Socks, all these ideas build during her reading British novels which makes her see that the only type of character that is worthy to write about are whites. But after reading the works of Chinua Achebe, she gave her permission to write her own stories.

Several critics of African literature have pointed out that one of the major reasons Chinua Achebe was inspired to become a writer was his desire to counter the demeaning image of Africa that was portrayed in the English tradition of the novel. What is yet to be done is a systematic analysis of the manner in which Achebe's portrait of Africa and the Africans differs from those painted by the European novelists.<sup>38</sup>

However, when I said that Achebe had invented African literature, I was thinking about something more than the existence of his novels as the Ur-texts of our literary tradition; what I had in mind then was the tremendous influence his works have had on the institutions of pedagogy and interpretation and the role his fictions have come to play in the making and unmaking of African worlds. Like most émigré African intellectuals, I am ambivalent about the institutionalization of *Things Fall Apart* and the wisdom of using it as supplement for African culture or the authorized point of entry into Igbo, Nigerian, or African landscapes. Within Africa, itself.<sup>39</sup>

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37 Ibid.

38 Okafor Clement Abiaziem, "Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe: Two Antipodal Portraits of Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* Vol.19, No.1 (1988), pp.17-28; p. 17.

39 Gikande Simon, "Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture," *Research in African Literature* Vol.32, No.3 (2001), pp.3-8; p.6.

Chinua Achebe is Africa's most widely read novelist and the first to be taken seriously by both African and European readers. His novels and critical pronouncements have profoundly influenced his readers' understanding of Africans and their lives and have formed the basis for many a discussion of the African novel. They have also provided a model for succeeding African novelists to follow and contend with. Yet, Achebe's first and most influential novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in which Igbo people are depicted as people with great social institutions. Their culture is rich and respected with customs and laws that place great emphasis on traditional system.<sup>40</sup>

*Things Fall Apart* is an attempt to give a less superficial picture not only of the country but even of the Nigerian character, challenging and displacing the narratives of colonialist writers like Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad meant for Achebe the appropriation representation to prove that the communities of his African past were neither “primitive” nor “without history”.<sup>41</sup>

I would be quite satisfied if my novels did no more than teach my readers that their past was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them<sup>42</sup>

When Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, it appears clearly that she is influenced by Chinua Achebe even her first lines are the same as of Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*. After its publication a professor at Johns Hopkins informed Adichie that it was not authentically African because she used characters that are educated and middle class. They drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore, they were not authentically African, because the professor has consumed the long literary tradition of the Africa of Joseph Conrad and Karen Blixen who portrayed African people as savages and cannibals.

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40 Innes Catherine, *Chinua Achebe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.1.

41 Bloom Harold, *Modern Critical Interpretations: Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010), p.6.

42 Ibid.

The brilliance of her novel *Americanah* lies in its defiance of the single story. Through her protagonist Ifemelu, Adichie tells an untold story. It is a story about Nigeria; about immigration; about race; about gender; and it challenges the stereotypes planted in readers minds by the stories we have been told again and again by European writers.

What Adichie's want to highlight in her TED is the crucial role that literature plays in telling the stories of others. It is through literature from across the globe that we are able to see the stereotypes of nations and their cultures that Western literature has painted in the first place, through global literature that we are able to foster some kind of feeling and understanding for experiences of those different to ourselves. Literature provides people with a voice, a way to have their story heard, but by focusing predominantly on the voice of the white Western man, we are deaf to so many important others needs to be heard loud and clear: diversity in literature is the means to avoid these dangerous single stories, the means by which we can bring the marginalized voices to centre stage.<sup>43</sup>Literature being the best way to combat stereotype.

Since Africa in Eurocentric eyes has been always seen as a wild and savage place where people were suffering, the twenty first century marked the advent of so called Third Generation of Nigerian writers who explore the social and cultural complexities of their countries of origin and the exploration of character's emotional development outside.

### **3. The Voice Of the Third Generation**

In latest years, unique and exciting traits were taking place in Nigerian literature. This new body of literature, collectively referred to as The Third Generation, has currently received an international acclaim Chris Abani's *Grace Land* , Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, Dulue Mbachu's *War Games* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* have emerged from this new

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<sup>43</sup> Fells Ellie, "The Danger of Single Story", *The Stray* December 13, 2017. <https://thestrays.org/2017/11/13/the-danger-of-a-single-story/> accessed 17.12.2017.

body of writing. These books are described as "Coming of Age" novels. Despite the fact that the authors of the Third Generation are commonly fairly young, the term Third Generation specifically refers to a textual rather than to an authorial development<sup>44</sup>. The term Third Generational authors, as a result, refer to those authors who assemble works that fall within this new discipline or body of writing. This term is characterized by: voicing marginal (gender) identities, breaking taboos, reinterpreting and revisiting longstanding themes and events to allow for the articulation of contemporary commentary, engaging with hybridization and multiculturalism, challenging social and literary conventions, and reflecting national and political engagement.<sup>45</sup>

Nigeria's First Generation of writers published their works during the colonial period that lasted until after independence (greater or much less from the 1940s to late 1960s). Adesanmi and Dunton write that the First and Second Generations were mostly born during the first five decades of the twentieth century when the colonial event was in full force. "*Their textualities were therefore massively overdetermined by that experience*".<sup>46</sup> In this way, the writers of the First Generation aimed at re-establishing an identity engrained in their cultural and traditional inheritance that had been so infected by the colonial experience. Among those writers Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and Flora Nwapa.

Although the Second Generations were also born into the colonial event, their formative years were mostly shaped by independence and its aftermath of disillusionment and stasis. Rather, they revel in the depiction of the pathetic circumstances of the poor masses in a society (Nigerian) in which the oppressed and the oppressor, the exploiter and the exploited, share unequal and uneasy coexistence.<sup>47</sup>

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44 Smit Jacobus Willem, *Becoming the Third Generation Negotiating Modern Selves in Nigerian Bildungsromane of the 21st Century*, (Master Degree, Stellenbosch University).p1.

45 Ibid.

46 Adesanmi Pius and Chris Dunton, "Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography Considerations," *English in Africa* Vol.32, No.1 (2005), pp.7-19; p.14.

47 Eko Ebele and Ernest Emenyonu, *Literature and National Consciousness* (Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989), p.58.

In this context, the expressions exploiter and oppressor refer to the neocolonial government. In an attempt to come to terms with their generation's sense of frustration, disillusionment, alienation, estrangement and violence, the Second Generation offered new explanations for, and narratives of nation and personhood. Among the Second Generation authors, who were most affected by the crisis of the era, were Ben Okri, Odia Ofeimun, Buchi Emecheta, Femi Osofican and Niyi Osundare, who wrote primarily from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. Their work shaped the center on which the Third Generation created their work in the mid 1980 which they wrote towards tortuous background of unsettling political actions, and within the ruins of a devastated country and economy.

Many Third Generation writers have also faulted critics, teachers, and universities for being gradual to include their work together with that of the first two generations. A number of them have voiced their frustration at stagnant ideas of Nigerian literature that do not encompass more recent work which they argue greater appropriately displays and responds to contemporary Nigeria. For example, in an interview with Poets and Writers magazine, Helon Habila distinguishes his fiction from the work of earlier writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri:

They made the way for us, for the younger generation to follow. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we have to continue writing in the same tradition that they wrote in. If you have read my book, you will see that it is totally different from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. I try to avoid that I don't know what to call it that exotic stuff. I want to write about the reality that is happening now.<sup>48</sup>

Adesanmi and Dunton refer to the writings of the Third Generation as:

Texts born into the scopic regime of the postcolonial and the postmodern, an order of knowledge in which questions of subjecthood and agency are not only massively over determined by the politics of identity in a multicultural and transnational frame but in which the tropes of otherness and sublaternity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile

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48 Bures Frank. "Everything Follows", interview with Poets and Writers Magazine, February 2003.

totalities such as history, nation, gender, and their representative symbolologies<sup>49</sup>

Many African female authors like Nwapa, Emecheta, Dangaremba, Mugo and Aidoo among others have written stories in search of expunging women's marginal positions and thus their texts are "*spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate*"<sup>50</sup> as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi. In this regard, Almeida considers writing by women as "*a weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality.*"<sup>51</sup>

African women scholars like Emecheta, Kolawole, Badejo and Ogunyemi have denied and rejected the label feminism as they discover women's voicelessness and or (in)audibility and human tyranny in their texts. They have accused Western Feminism of universalizing women's experience and hence causing cultural imperialism. Edward Said confirms that Third World societies are designated in exclusionary terms and so women are excluded lot from most discourses even those that concern them. Min-Ha with the same view, he claims that Third World women are treated as an out-group to be spoken for by mainstream in-group. This leads to the big question posed by Spivak, How does one represent the self and others? such a debate has seen African women writers engage in an exercise of re-inventing, re-defining and re-assessing themselves in politics of appropriation implied in otherness and inherent in the tradition of Western Feminism. The submissions of Hander are quite relevant to this study since she argues that women have broken rules of race and gender in order to embody hope for the future of the nation. This means that women are integral in building a new African society, stressing the damaging effect of subjugation outside the colonizer-colonized relationship.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Ibid.

50 Sam Abbenyi Juliana, *Gender in African Women's Writing: Reconstructing Identity, Sexuality and Difference* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1977), p.68.

51 D'almeida Assiba Iréne, *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (Montgomery: Florida University Press, 1994), p.102.

52 Arnfred Signe, *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institution, 2004), p.251.

Adichie, as an African woman writer pays attention to how she engages herself in creating oppositional discourse to bring into the surface human suffering and the humiliation suffered by women in particular and the African people in general. Adichie becomes the voice of her people and her generation by creating fictional stories aimed at subverting oppressive constructions in her society because African women writers have to create stories that are appropriate and instructive as their first concern as they struggle with women oppression and countless problems that obstacle the continent.<sup>53</sup> Ogunyemi contends that African female writers should not be limited to issues defined by their femaleness but should attempt to tackle questions raised by their humanity. Adichie through her characters define and names the struggle of Africa.<sup>54</sup>

Stratton in her book *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* explores the definitive discourses of African literature and identifies colonialism, patriarchy and dialogue on gender as the key features of categorization. She notes the complex link between colonial and African (male) literature and the literary tradition that excludes the female voice. She writes, "*considering their invisibility in the dominant critical tradition, it is not surprising that women writers have not gained admission in the literary canon the result is all male canons*".<sup>55</sup> Similar sentiments are expressed by Emenyonu who declares that there is a critical imbalance and lack of objectivity in the appreciation of works by women and the image of womanhood depicted by male authors.<sup>56</sup> These ideas propose that women's writing did not draw much critical attention as male writing did. Thus, Adichie's novels examine how her writing is an addition of female voice to African literary tradition.

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53 Kivai Mboya Georgiads , *The Female Voice and the Future of Gender Relationship in the Nigerian Nation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun*, (Master Degree, Kenyatta University).p.6.

54 Ogunyemi Chikwenye, "Womanism: the Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English Signs," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Vol.11, No. 1 (1985), pp 63-80; p.68.

55 Stratton Florence, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (New York: Roulledge,1994),p.3

56 Nduka Adewale Toyin and Segun Onowunmi, *Breaking the Silence: an Anthology of Short Stories* (Logos: Women Writers of Nigeria, 1998), p.112.

Although Adichie writes from the diaspora, the experiences of her origin eagerly helped her to visualize and embrace the problems and the struggles of her people in her novels. Third Generation writer Toyin Adewale in her *Breaking the Silence*, her anthology of short fiction, when she asks the question: where are my literary foremothers and sisters? her unanswered question contains numerous possibilities: those women writers have been excluded from the canon; that women have faced gender specific obstacles economic, cultural, and psychological making it difficult or impossible to write or finally that a combination of both has excluded and silenced women. Adewale herself has attempted to cure both issues by publishing her anthology, which has brought attention to many more female voices, and founding a supportive network for established and emerging authors, Women Writers of Nigeria.

Hewett writes that: *the emerging account of this generation is one of triumph over adversity, a story of courageous individuals refusing to be silenced and the greater community supporting them. It is a remarkable story, one that is still being written by critics and the writers themselves.*<sup>57</sup> These central characters thus stubbornly reject being silent in the face of corruption, inequality and discrimination.

As one of the youngest members of this generation, Adichie has thus far followed a trajectory to some extent different from many of her peers, particularly those whose professions have developed primarily in Nigeria. These differences originate from her decision to attend college and graduate school in the U.S, which has meant that she has followed a career path common for young American writers. Furthermore, her works extended the scope of understanding and characterizations of Third Generation Nigerian writing. While her fiction reveals various influences on Nigerian writers, particularly from the First Generation, it also echoes with a wide range of texts from Nigeria, other African nations,

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<sup>57</sup>Hewett Heather, "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation," *English in Africa*, Vol.32, No.1 (2005), pp.73-97; p.74.

and throughout the black Atlantic. Like her peers, Adichie in a close examination of her work suggests that she is directly engaged with the Nigerian literary canon and is furthermore making a case for her inclusion in it.

Adichie revises Achebe's novel in several ways. She takes one of his themes, the breakdown of family and community under the pressures of colonialism and religion, and recasts it in post-independent Nigeria when colonialism's effects stress family and community. While Achebe explored the relations between religion and colonialism and their impacts on traditional Nigeria, Adichie refocuses the inquiry through adding gender. Her feminist revisioning to use Adrienne Rich's term occurs through an "appropriation" and an "inversion," both strategies used by many African women writers. Indeed, as Florence Stratton argues, the first writer to revise Achebe was Flora Nwapa, who challenged her predecessor's idealization of motherhood in *Things Fall Apart* by revealing its constraints and burdens in *Efuru*, published eight years later and her challenge was taken up by Second Generation writer Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood*. Adichie's narration reveals what cannot be seen in Achebe's text; as Deirdre Lashgiri observes, "*Shifting the vantage point of the subject allows us to see forms of violence that had been invisible, or to see in unfamiliar ways. When the gaze is redefined, what it encompasses changes, deconstructing the master narrative*".<sup>58</sup> However, she displaced Achebe's omniscient narration for the first person.

Adichie's and Iweala's texts show how the Third Generation draws from the themes and subject matter of older generations in which they are able to reinterpret and represent it from their more contemporary point of view.

In describing the work of the Third Generation, Adesanmi argues that many of these writers have evolved an "*aesthetics of pain in order to represent their hopes and dreams*

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58 Lashgiri Deirdre, *Introduction to Speak the Unspeakable: Implications of Gender, Race, Class, and Culture, Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 121.

*tragically atrophied by the Nigerian system*"<sup>59</sup>. The expression "aesthetics of pain" refers to the work of many women writers of this generation, including Adichie, who have discovered women's physical experiences in their poetry and fiction. The Third Generation situates the lives of their respective central character within the here and now.

Concerning developing realities in Africa, understanding marginalization and oppression of women in the male patriarchal society and writing to set up women as speaking subjects. The objective of the African woman writer's is to redefine the woman's use of authority and search for entry into the public sphere since their voices have been marginalized. Adichie's attempt to study the marginal and secondary position taken by women marks the uprising of her narratives. In this context, Adichie suggests that women should act to change how society operates through her characters who were angry about oppression and lack of freedom at both domestic and public levels. Adichie's voice calls upon women to identify all forms of social oppression. She uses some characters to open women's eyes to the actualities of patriarchy and suggests other ways to self-actualization. She stands against oppression when everyone else is silent. Through this character, Adichie states her beliefs that the oppressed should persistently challenge their oppressor.

African women writers have tried to uncover the gaps and silences, exposing biases and prejudices. In this regard, Adichie also claims that her writing attempts to correct the negative portrayal of Africa by the Western culture.

Within feminist studies, critics argued over giving voice to oneself as an act of self creation, a declare to authorship and authority that allows the woman writer to express herself over the power of language. Claiming a voice is an inner act that consequences from tapping into the authority derived from any individual's lived experience. It does not rely upon outside sources of power, whether institutional, cultural, or discursive; to the contrary, it often

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59 Toyin Falola and Harlow Barbara, *Palavers of African Literature: Essays in Honor of Bernth Lindfors* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002), p.105.

challenges them. The barriers preventing women from claiming their voice are many; they range from the task of challenging the patriarchal structures of one's particular culture or society to the common absence of literary ancestors. However, this situation led Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar to assume the existence of an "anxiety of authorship" for British and American women writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's. In contrast, African writers own a rich oral tradition to call upon, a tradition of storytelling that precedes and continues to exist together with written narrative. This oral tradition has played a significant role for many African writers, especially for women.<sup>60</sup> Like many of the works of the other young Nigerian writers, Adichie through her works reveals a recurrent concern with the postcolonial disorder that takes place under the domestic world of her characters, and her observations about one family's private struggle extend into the scope of political metaphor.

Every society that manages to extricate itself from colonial domination has to grapple with a set of new problems among them alienation, and double consciousness, Frantz Fanon in his clinical book *Black Skin White Masks* offers an insight into these psychological problems that faced people in western societies, his main goal was to stage an examination to discover the various mental attitudes the blacks adopt in the face of white civilization.

## **Part Two: Theoretical Background**

### **1. Black Skin White Masks**

Frantz Fanon was one of the most powerful voices of revolutionary thought in the twentieth century. Born on the French island colony of Martinique, he is a psychiatrist. His origins and his experience in both Martinique and France exposed him to the issues of racism and colonialism. An important influence on him was his teacher Aimé Césaire, a leader of the so-called Negritude Movement which called for cultural separation rather than assimilation of

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60 Warhol Robyn and Hemd Price Diane, *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick:Rutgers University Press,1997),pp.298-300.

blacks. Fanon's books included *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952), translated as *Black Skin White Masks* (1967), which explored the psychological effects of racism and colonialism.

*Black Skin White Masks'* imagistic title in which Fanon uses to examine the colonial subject's crisis of self-identification, as the binary formulation of black skins and white masks describes several theoretical dichotomies: psychoanalytical, in the employment of a mask to obscure true identity; dialectical, in the play of opposing racial identities and symbolically Manichean forces; and ontological, in the subsuming of black identity by the mask of white identity. The Negro is Black but, according to Fanon, the effects of colonialism's white mask prevent him from existing by and for herself. He must exist by and for white civilization. The black man tries to put on white masks in order to assimilate the white man and to pretend to be white. He is doing so by behaving, looking and speaking like a white. "*White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro*"<sup>61</sup>

This existential deviation is manifest in the colonized subject's forced denial of her own native identity. Wearing a white mask negates black identity and all that it represents. He insists that the colonial subject's inferiority complex is the direct result of socio-economic forces created by colonialism. In his introduction Fanon announces that:

If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily economic; subsequently, the internalization or better the epidermalization of this inferiority.<sup>62</sup>

The social and economic realities of colonialism that necessitate native poverty and degradation while ensuring imperial wealth and privilege, for him for as long as he is black he will remain inferior in the eyes of the European colonizer and justifiably oppressed.

The color of skin defines people's cultural identity. This statement summarizes Frantz Fanon's key message of his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. It addresses how black people are judged and culturally identified based only on the color of their skin. In Fanon's book *Black*

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61 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 12.

62 Ibid., p.10.

*Skin, White Masks*; he describes the struggles of himself, a black man, who is living in a world dominated by white people. In this world the white man is constructing a racial frame upon black people which is based on the color of their skin.

Fanon career as psychiatrist, start during his psychiatric residency in France at Saint Alban hospital in 1952, Fanon studied under a professor who exposed him to socio-therapy, He applied this method of socio-therapy to the individual, to the social setting of the French colonial Antilles, he uses the colonized subject as the psychiatric patient, he analyses her larger socio-political context as a subject of Western empire, affected by its ideological and political discourses of racism.

Fanon announces that psychoanalysis as his primary method in *Black Skin, White Masks*, declaring: “*Before beginning the case, I have to say certain things. The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological*”<sup>63</sup>

The most influential chapter of *Black Skin White Masks* in which Fanon defines “The Fact of Blackness”, the Lived Experience of the Black,” through his autobiographical encounters of his own racial experience. He challenges the reader’s senses by exclaiming: “*Dirty nigger,*” or simply “*Look a Negro!*”<sup>64</sup> .He positioned himself as the colonial neurotic by delving in to his own damaged psyche. “*Fanon goes to a deeper level of interiority: his own experience as lived. He finds in his autobiographical moment, a set of these converging.*”<sup>65</sup>

In Martinique as Fanon explains in his book that the dream of turning white was a common salvation dream among the black and colored populations. The magical salvation offered in the dream was a solution to the painful circumstances in which the Martiniquan was forced to live. The world as perceived by the Antillean was Manichean in character divided

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63 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, 4.

64 Ibid., p.82.

65 Parris LaRose T, "Frantz Fanon: Existentialist, Dialectician and Revolutionary," *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.4, No.7, pp.4-23; p.14.

into clearly demarcated regions. These exclusive spheres corresponded to specific values, the white to the world of wealth, beauty, strength and virtue, and the black to a world of poverty, sexual prodigality, primitivism and worthlessness. The salvation dream expresses the secret wish of all black Antilleans the wish to be white.<sup>66</sup> Fanon traces out that the only possible escape for Negro from the tragedy of being black was through entry into the social and cultural milieu of the European.

Double consciousness as a term coined by Du Bois to explain the process of being both a black and an American in the United States. Fanon in his book provided valuable information on the mental conflict associated with having a dual identity. It is still a dilemma that African Americans face in this white dominated society. Most African Americans feel it is safe to say we are all Americans until they experience a rude encounter with racism. *"Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned."*<sup>67</sup>

Double consciousness refers to the state of being cognizant of two experiences that impact life. Those experiences are the African characteristics on the one hand, and the American characteristics on the other with the hope that both will merge to create a union that is better than the experience that each provides as a single unit, influence about race as projected through mass media and the educational process caused many African Americans to internalize self-hatred and give up their culture.<sup>68</sup>

In the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness', Fanon describes how the identity of black people is not something that created but rather something which is imposed upon them by the society in which they live in, the color of their skin defines cultural identity.

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66 McCulloch Jock, *Black Soul White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.65.

67 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, 138.

68 Green Ricky, "Double Consciousness," *McNair Schools Journal* Vol.15, pp. 1-18; p.2.

An incident that happened to Fanon in a train where a little boy is afraid of him because of the color of his skin “*mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!*”<sup>69</sup>, from this moment Fanon's search for his self consciousness really start.

Fanon in his path to search for his self-consciousness realizes that the black man is between two frames. The frame of his ancestors whose customs and habits were wiped out and the frame of the white society which is denying seeing him as an equal human being. From this moment, Fanon understands that the black problem is based solely on the color of his skin. *Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or less, pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.*<sup>70</sup>

The five stages of Fanon’s search for self-consciousness can be summarized as: Fanon is aware of the black problem and is shocked and he sees that Negritude Movement is the solution for all black's problem but he finally recognizes that Negritude Movement is not the mere solution because the white world’s gaze decides what black people are. “*Ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society*”<sup>71</sup> means that black's problem unsolved.

Fanon intended that his first book should serve as an instrument to help end the problems of the Negro. It was to function in much the same way as psychoanalysis does in freeing the neurotic from his illness. “*This book, it is hoped, will be a mirror with a progressive infrastructure, in which it will be possible to discern the Negro on the road to disalienation.*”<sup>72</sup>

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69 Ibid.,p. xxix.

70 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*,83.

71 Ibid., p.82.

72 Ibid.,p142.

In the second chapter, attention is focused on different matters that faced African American immigrants in the United States of America such as displacement, alienation, racial discrimination and the crisis of identity besides, how beauty ,hair texture and skin color connected to the current reality of race.

## CHAPTER 2. RACE AND DISCRIMINATION

In a globalised world where boundaries of nations merge in the name of economic development, the concept of people feeling free to move anywhere in the world, getting equal treatment seems very normal and predictable. However, in reality the whole concept does not .operate since there are many barriers in it

### 1. Migration and Identity

#### 1.1. The Push and Pull Factors of Migration

International migration has increased in over the past decades; it is a global phenomenon which associated with movement of people from one location to another. There are two types of migration: internal migration and international migration. Internal migration is the movement of people from one place to other place in a given country. International migration is the movement of people from one country to another in order to take up employment to establish residence or to increase in living standard.<sup>73</sup>

The basic factors which motivate migration may be classified as ‘Push Factors’ and ‘Pull Factors’. The push factors are factors that compel a person, due to different reasons, to leave that place and go to some other place. The Pull Factors are factors which attract the migrants to an area. Opportunities for better employment, higher wages, facilities, better working conditions and attractive amenities are pull factors of an area.<sup>74</sup>

The important factors which motivate people to move may broadly be classified into different groups:

Economic Factors: migration is primarily motivated by economic factors among them hope for better employment due to the lack of jobs in their countries , hope for family to have a higher standard of living; better shelter , availability of money and food to secure their lives

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<sup>73</sup> Kainth Singh Gursharam "Push and Pull Factors of Migration: A Case Study of Brick Kiln Migrant Workers in Punjab," *Munich Personal RePEe Archive*, No.30036 (2010), pp.1-34; p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

because the majority of people lived in lower standard of living in their native countries. So, they migrated to other countries to fulfill their dreams.

Social Factors: lack of health care, lack of educational opportunities in their homeland because of these factors from one side and encouragement from family and friends from other side and the impact of the television urge them to immigrate to have better educational opportunities and better health care.

Political Factors; sometimes even political factors encourage or discourage migration from region to another because of the unfair legal system ,war and terrorism lack of governmental tolerance, and corruption .These factors lead them to immigrate to gain protection under the legal laws.

Ifemelu has the chance to obtain a student visa and goes to the United States in her early twenties to study and fulfill her dream; she has high hopes and expectations that in America she can realize her dreams, aspirations. She talks about her passion for the U.S. when she repeatedly argues that "*America is my dreams country*", "*all I had was my passion for America*", "*I love America I realized I could buy America*"<sup>75</sup> . Besides, Obinze has a clear picture of their future: "*We'll go to America when we graduate and raise our fine children*".<sup>76</sup>

Ifemelu argues that the reasons that allow her to immigrate to the United State were the worst situation in her Nigerian university "*campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Students hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all. Everyone was talking about leaving*"<sup>77</sup>. Moreover, the bribery and corruption that are rooted in her country among the reasons to immigrate "*in my country, South Africa, Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all kinds of crazy stuff*".<sup>78</sup>

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75 Adichie Chimmanda Ngozi, *Americanah* (New York: Knopf, 2013), p.422.

76 Ibid.,p.97.

77 Ibid.,p.102.

78 *Americanah*, p.189.

Ginika's father, a university professor also decides to take his family to America because he suffers a lot in his country; he said *"we are not sheep. This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salaries and there is no chalk in the classrooms"*.<sup>79</sup>

Ifemelu migrates to the United States for her higher education but after a period of time, she has faced problems in adapting to the American way of life, she falls into traumatic depression. The African dream of America becomes a deception. Forcing them into the lives of alienation, hopelessness, and disappointments. *"It's wonderful but it's not heaven."*<sup>80</sup>

Ifemelu's hopelessness in the U.S, her inability to find a job, go to school and accomplish her American dream *"a sudden crushing loneliness lanced through her and stayed with her for weeks."*<sup>81</sup> She falls into a depression

She woke up torpid each morning, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of day that lay ahead. Everything had thickened. She was swallowed, lost in a viscous haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness. Between her and what she should feel, there was a gap. She cared about nothing. She wanted to care, but she no longer knew how; it had slipped from her memory, the ability to care. Sometimes she woke up flailing and helpless, and she saw, in front of her and behind her and all around her, an utter hopelessness. She knew there was no point in being here, in being alive, but she had no energy to think concretely of how she could kill herself.<sup>82</sup>

These African diasporas populations imagine the U.S. as a paradise and a Promised Land; a place where their hopes and aspirations can be fulfilled. Ifemelu says that America is a fascinating place, place where can accomplish her dream, she takes this idea from watching *The Cosby Show* where black families are depicted in a positive light. Believing that blacks' families in America are successful, happy and wealthy. *"And so she began to dream. She saw*

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79 Ibid.,p.86.

80 Ibid.,p.422.

81 Ibid.,p.14.

82 Ibid.,p.158.

*herself in a house from The Cosby Show, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease "*.<sup>83</sup>

After a period of time Ifemelu realizes that everything she had seen on television about the U.S. is misleading and misrepresented, because of the negative experience that Ifemelu faces in the U.S., she gets depressed and feels dehumanized because her white classmates at the university believe that she is from a barbaric and savage African jungle. She suffers from emotional and psychological alienation; she is traumatized and behaves weird. Ginika thinks that she suffers from depression as a result of racism that faces in United State. They suffer from social problems for example, in America, they are extremely poor, they could not afford apartments, Ifemelu and her friend Ginika are looking for an apartment in West Philadelphia in an extremely poor and dangerous neighborhood .Ifemelu surprised by poor conditions that finds ,all her dreams fall apart;

Ifemelu surprised by the rotting cabinets in the kitchen, the mouse that dashed past an empty bedroom. My hostel in Nsukka was dirty but there were no rats o. It's a mouse, Ginika said. Ifemelu was about to sign a lease if saving money meant living with mice, then so be it when Ginika's friend told them of a room for rent, a great deal, as college life went. It was in a four-bedroom apartment with moldy carpeting, above a pizza store on Powelton Avenue, on the corner where drug addicts sometimes dropped crack pipes, miserable pieces of twisted metal that glinted in the sun. Ifemelu's room was the cheapest, the smallest, facing the scuffed brick walls of the next building<sup>84</sup>

The first night of Ifemelu's in the US, she has to sleep on the floor; she is overwhelmed even she did several times.

That night, after he and Aunty Uju got into bed and Ifemelu settled on a blanket on the floor, she said, How come she has to sleep on the floor, Mom? We can all fit in, as though he could sense how Ifemelu felt. There was nothing wrong with the arrangement she had, after all, slept on mats when she visited her grandmother in the

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83*Americanah*, p.103.

84*ibid.*,p.130.

village but this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor<sup>85</sup>

After this disappointment Ifemelu starts writing blogs, she becomes a successful blogger and speaker on race and racism and she considers it as a venue for expressing her experience as an African immigrant and for provoking a conversation about race and migration.”*she signed on to WordPress, and her blog was born. She would later change the name, but at first she called it Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*”.<sup>86</sup> After Ifemelu decides to change the title of her blog to *Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*.<sup>87</sup>

She describes her experiences with the reality of race in the United States in detail in her narration and in her blog posts, she deals with important societal issues, including discrimination and human relations, immigrants’ experiences, and gender inequality in America.

Aunty Uju flees from Nigeria in the hopes to find a better future for both her son and herself. Aunty Uju, who had never had intended to leave Nigeria, struggles in her host society. One of the most prevalent reasons for her struggle is the fact that she cannot find an occupation as a doctor. In Nigeria her occupation as a physician represented prestige. Nevertheless, she soon learns that in America she is not qualified enough because she is a black woman.

I’m tired. I am so tired. I thought by now things would be better for me and Dike. It’s not as if anybody was helping me and I just could not believe how quickly money went. I was studying and working three jobs. I was doing retail at the mall, and a research assistantship, and I even did some hours at Burger King<sup>88</sup>

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85 *Americanah*, p. 109.

86 *Ibid.*,p.294.

87 *Ibid.*,p.310.

88 *Americanah*, p. 113.

Her son Dike, on the other hand, suffers so much from racism that in the end he tries to commit suicide because of his sense of otherness. *“Ifemelu, his suicide attempt was from depression, Auntie Uju said gently, quietly. It is a clinical disease. Many teenagers suffer from it.”*<sup>89</sup>

Ifemelu’s displeasure with raising her children in American way after seeing Dike. Jane said. *“The hardest thing is raising my kids. Look at Elizabeth, I have to be very careful with her. If you are not careful in this country, your children become what you don’t know. It’s different back home because you can control them. Here, no.”*<sup>90</sup>

Ifemelu said:

I realized that if I ever have children, I don’t want them to have American childhoods. I don’t want them to say Hi to adults. I want them to say good morning and good afternoon. I don’t want them to mumble good when someone says how are you? to them or raise five fingers when asked how old they are. I want them to say I’m fine and talks back to adults in the name of self-expression. Is that terrible conservative?<sup>91</sup>

Despite her success as a blogger as depicted later in the book. *“Her blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship at Princeton.”*<sup>92</sup>

She returns to her home after several years:

You are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn’t pay that well,” Auntie Uju had said and then repeated herself, as though to make Ifemelu see the gravity of her own foolishness. Only her old friend in Lagos, Ranyinudo, had made her return seem normal. Lagos is now full of American returnees, so you better come back and join them. Every day you see them carrying a bottle of water as

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89 Ibid.,p.370.

90 Ibid.,p.116.

91 Ibid.,p.444

92 Ibid.,p.13.

if they will die of heat if they are not drinking water every minute.<sup>93</sup>

Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil<sup>94</sup>

Identity is a very questionable topic among African immigrants after leaving their homeland, they struggle whether to stay attached to their old identity and reject anything foreigner or, give up their identities and adopt American identity to have more opportunities.

## 1.2. The Contested Concept of Identity

*“Every colonized people in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle”.*

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lan Markman(London: Pluto Press,2008),p.9.

In recent years, the question of identity has been put at the center of debates presenting itself differently in different places and in different contexts. Identity is a broad and ambiguous concept in the modern world.

Beverly Daniel Tatum identifies identity as *"The concept of identity is a complex one shaped by individual characteristics, family, dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts"*.<sup>95</sup>

Hall states that identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think. Instead, of identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This

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93Americanah,p.20.

94 Ibid., p.13.

95Tatum Beverly Daniel, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?:and other Conversations about Race* (New York :Basic Books, 2003),p.9.

view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term, cultural identity lays claim.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Weeks defines identity as:

Belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core to your individuality. But it is also about your relationships, your complex involvement with others and in the modern world these have become ever more complex and confusing. Each of us live with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able bodied or disabled, British or European the list is potentially infinite, and so therefore are our possible belongings. Which of them we focus on, bring to therefore, identify with, depends on a host of factors. At the center, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others<sup>97</sup>

In this regard, Mercer's definition of identity is

Just now everybody wants to talk about identity. As a key word in contemporary politics it has taken on so many different connotations that sometimes it is obvious that people are not even talking about the same thing. One thing at least is clear identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. From this angle, the eagerness to talk about identity is symptomatic of the postmodern predicament of contemporary politics<sup>98</sup>

Amin Maalouf in his book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* speaks about the issue of identity in which he states, "identity is in the first place a matter of symbols, even of appearances."<sup>99</sup> He also says that "what characterises each individual identity: it is complex, unique and irreplaceable, not to be confused with any other."<sup>100</sup>

Maalouf stresses that:

Identity can't be compartmentalized. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of

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96 Hall Stuart, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.222.

97 Rutherford Jonathan, *Identity Community, Culture, Differences* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), p.88.

98 Rutherford, *Identity Community, Culture, Differences*, 43.

99 Maalouf Amin. *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. Translated from the French by Barbara Bray (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), p.120.

100 Ibid., p.20.

many components in a mixture that is unique to me, just as other people's identity is unique to them as individuals<sup>101</sup>

In other words, it cannot be put into segments or parts.

Georgia Warnke in her book *After Identity: Rethinking Race, Sex and Gender* defines the concept of identity in which she states "*identity is a question of power and of the introjection of power.*"<sup>102</sup> In addition, she confirms, "*an identity is never either the whole of who we are or who we always are. Rather, who we are depends upon the context in which the question arises and the purposes for which it is asked.*"<sup>103</sup>

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in his book *Moving The Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* states that "*a sense of belonging, a sense of identity is part of our psychological survival.*" Identity is socially constructed not given, affected and influenced by many factors, giving individuals a sense of whom they are and where they belong in which it changes as their life change.<sup>104</sup>

Chris Weedon in his book *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging* defines identity as "*identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is*".<sup>105</sup>

Adichie, in her novel *Americanah* tends to show how Nigerian immigrants especially women of color struggle to find a place for themselves and how race and Africans were perceived in the United States. Ifemelu struggles throughout the novel with the many identities she has to wear as a Nigerian and an immigrant in the United States.

When Ifemelu goes to the registration office, Cristina Tomas there speaks very slowly because of Ifemelu's Nigerian accent. When Ifemelu says she speaks English, Cristina replies,

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101 Ibid.,p.2.

102 Warnke Georgia. *After Identity Rethinking Race, Sex and Gender* (Combridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.66.

103 Ibid., p.7.

104 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1993), p.95.

105 Weedon Chris. *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging* (Maidenhead: Open University Press,2004),p.19.

*"I bet you do I just don't know how well".*<sup>106</sup> This is, again, an instance in which the norm is present and reproduced by a white person, thereby showing to Ifemelu that her Nigerian accent is not good enough, at that moment, *"Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Tomas's before she took the forms, she shrank"*.<sup>107</sup> It is the impact of Tomas's gaze that makes Ifemelu shrink. She feels humiliated because *"she had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate"*.<sup>108</sup> Because of the painfulness of this experience, she begins to practice the American accent. Obinze encourages her and suggests reading American novels to help her integrate *"Obinze suggested she read American books, novels and histories and biographies. In his first e-mail to her"*.<sup>109</sup>

Ifemelu attends a speech given by the president of the African Students Association of a university in Philadelphia in which he states *"Very soon you will start to adopt an American accent. You will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents"*.<sup>110</sup> As if the president makes it clear that most Africans will adopt an American accent after a short time.

Ifemelu also learns to adapt American vocabulary. For instance the word "fat" is a word with a negative connotation in the United States *"Ginika told her was that fat in America was a bad word, heaving with moral judgment like stupid or bastard, and not a mere description like short or tall. So she had banished fat from her vocabulary"*.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, the word "half-caste" is an insult in the United States, whereas in Nigeria it is merely a description. Ifemelu learns to avoid the word "half-caste" and use "biracial" instead, Zainab explains to her that now herself says biracial not half-caste because it is offended when somebody says half-caste.

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106 *Americanah*, p.136.

107 *Ibid.*, p.137.

108 *Ibid.*

109 *Americanh*, p.138.

110 *Ibid.*, p.143.

111 *Ibid.*, p.12.

The word nigger, when Ifemelu is in class at university a discussion turns towards the question whether one can say the word nigger .An African American says it is acceptable when used by an African American .When a female voice asks why nigger was bleeped out. The teacher replays "*nigger is a word that exists. People use it. It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep it out*".<sup>112</sup> These examples show that Ifemelu adapts not only American accent, but also learns what words she had better replace by other ones.

Doris , Ifemelu's colleague at Zoe magazine, who returned from the US too, because she "*spoke with a teenage American accent that made her sentences sound like questions, except for when she was speaking to her mother on the phone; then her English took on a flat, solid Nigerianness*".<sup>113</sup> Although she pretends that she is not able to speak normal Nigerian English anymore, the fact that she tries when talking to her mother proves that she just wants to claim her status as a returnee.

When Ifemelu first arrives in the United States and Ginika, her old Nigerian friend gets her from the airport; Ginika tries to speak in Nigerian English. She speaks in "*a dated, overcooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was*",<sup>114</sup> later with her friends everything change, she has a perfectly American accent. Once Ginika is back with her roommates, she returns to her all American self.

When Ifemelu first sees Dike in the US after many years, he has grown up to be a "*first grader with a seamless American accent and a hyper-happiness about him*".<sup>115</sup> His mother Auntie Uju does not want Ifemelu to speak Igbo to Dike because she is afraid "*two languages will confuse him*"<sup>116</sup> because they live in America now, where Igbo isn't necessary at all .

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112 Ibid.,p.140.

113 *Americanah*, p.390.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.,p.109.

116 Ibid., p.113.

Nicolas, Obinzi's friend who immigrated to Britain faced the same problem as Aunty Uju and most immigrants who have the anxiety to raise their children speaking Igbo because it will harm them. *"He spoke to them only in English, careful English, as though he thought that the Igbo he shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious British accents"*.<sup>117</sup>

Halima among the immigrants, who face this problem upon her arrival to United States, she said suddenly animated, standing behind the woman. *"When I come here with my son they beat him in school because of African accent. In Newark. If you see my son face? purple like onion. They beat, beat, beat"*.<sup>118</sup>

One day, Ifemelu surprises when she hears Aunty Uju speaks in the supermarket with the cashier, her accent changes completely, it becomes a sole American, she pronounces the word put it with *"with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. Pooh-reet-back. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing"*.<sup>119</sup>

Besides, Aunty Uju changes even the pronunciation of her name when she was speaking to Americans, this incident makes Ifemelu angry,

Aunty Uju's cell phone rang. Yes, this is Uju. She pronounced it *youjoo* instead of *oo-joo*. Is that how you pronounce your name now? Ifemelu asked afterwards. It's what they call me. Ifemelu swallowed the words. Well, that isn't your name. Instead she said in Igbo, I did not know it would be so hot here<sup>120</sup>

Ifemelu upon her arrival she changes her name Ifemelunamma which means made in goodtime or beautifully made to Ngozi Okonkwo in order to secure a job because she cannot work with her visa Card as Aunty Uju always said,

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117 Ibid., p.238.

118 *Americanah*, p.189.

119 Ibid., p.112.

120 Ibid., p.108.

You can't work with your student visa, and work-study is rubbish, it pays nothing, and you have to be able to cover your rent and the balance of your tuition. Me, you can see I am working three jobs and yet it's not easy. I talked to one of my friends, I don't know if you remember Ngozi Okonkwo? She's now an American citizen and she has gone back to Nigeria for a while, to start a business. I begged her and she agreed to let you work with her Social Security card

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Obinze too is obliged to live with somebody else's identity in London, and often has to remind himself of his new name. He tries to make his situation legal through an arranged marriage, but the fraud is discovered and he is deported immediately.

After three years, Ifemelu decides to stop faking an American accent and to switch back to Nigerian English. her decision comes as result of a telemarketer's call ,the operator is surprised how good her accent .She is overcome by shame, feeling that it should not be a moment of victory to sound American, and switches back to her Nigerian accent. Perhaps this is the moment she realizes that she cannot and does not want to sacrifice her Nigerian identity in order to please Americans:

Ifemelu decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July, the same day she met Blaine. It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the creamy roll, the sentences starting with "so," and the sliding response of oh really, but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of lip, the curling of tongue. If she were in a panic, or terrified, or jerked awake during a fire, she would not remember how to produce those American sounds. And so she resolved to stop, on that summer day, the weekend of Dike's birthday. Her decision was prompted by a telemarketer's call <sup>122</sup>

Ifemelu shows that an American accent does not come naturally to her and that after spending several years in the United States, it still takes an effort to perform the accent,

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121 Ibid.,p.110.

122*Americanah*,p.176.

“Before, she would have said I know, that peculiar American expression that professed agreement rather than knowledge”.<sup>123</sup> She switches back to Nigerian English because she does not feel comfortable and herself when she speaks American English.

When she is back to Nigeria, her friends describe her with the name “Americanah”, to tease her about new Americanized way of behavior, as well as her sophisticated usage of American English “*Americanah! Ranyinudo teased her often. You are looking at things with American eyes.*”<sup>124</sup>

Ginika too she becomes a serious Americananh, just after a short trip to America,

She’ll come back and be a serious Americanah like Bisi,Ranyinudo said. They roared with laughter, at that word Americanah, wreathed in glee, the fourth syllable extended, and at the thought of Bisi, a girl in the form below them, who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred r to every English word she spoke<sup>125</sup>

Americanah which is a metaphor widely circulating in Lagos about Nigerian returnees from England, but mostly from America. The irony about Americanah is that they are individuals who often cover their personal shortcomings and frustrations with endless nostalgic musings about amenities and services they claim they miss in Lagos. It is a nickname given to Nigerians who move to the US then back to their native soil, taking back with them an array of affectations and snobberies about Nigeria and its differences with the West.

Ifemelu finds herself confused and disables to remember all street sides in Nigeria, she realizes that Nigeria has changed without having taken her into account that her absence has made her a stranger in the place believed to be her own. “*It was nostalgic and melancholy, a beautiful sadness for the things she had missed and the things she would never know.*”<sup>126</sup>

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123 Ibid.,p.11.

124 *Americanah*,p. 373.

125 Ibid.,p.69.

126 Ibid.,p.376.

After having lived in the United States fifteen years she does not visit Nigeria for more than a decade leaves her with a “*piercing homesickness*”<sup>127</sup> and the feeling of “*early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness*”.<sup>128</sup> Since Ifemelu does not actively make the effort to maintain contact with fellow Africans or even visit Nigeria, her disconnection from her past renders her subdued and feeling like an orphan in America.

Sigmund Freud refers to this sense of homesickness as uncanny or unhomely which means «*the multiple, negative, catastrophic conception of man who is not at home in the world, whose origin cannot be indicated in a positive way.*”<sup>129</sup> Also “*something that has an alienating or frightening effect that gives rise to anxiety*”.<sup>130</sup>

Adapting Freud’s theory to examine postcolonial fiction, Homi Bhabha refers to the unhomely as “*the estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world as a place where the borders between home and world become confused subsequently lead to the shock of recognition of the world in the home, the home in the world.*”<sup>131</sup> Or simply you are living in-between; feeling neither here nor there, you are not belonging to either location.

Lois Tyson in his book *critical Theory Today* refers to unhomed people or unhomeliness ; this psychological diseases “*to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee*”.<sup>132</sup>

The importance of skin color dated back to the period of slavery where lighter slaves usually are chosen to work in the big house instead of fields, till now blacks still suffer from this problem especially women because whiteness is a sign of privileges among them and it is a key element in the definition of beauty and self-esteem .

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127 Ibid.,p.13.

128 Ibid.

129Masschelein Anneleen , *the Unconcept: the Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*(Albany: University of New York Press,2011),p.142.

130 Ibid.

131 Bhabha Homi," The World and the Home", *Duke University Press*, Vol.32, No. 31(1992), pp.141-153;p.141.

132 Tyson Lois, *Critical Theory Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006),p.421.

## 2. Skin Color

*“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”*

B. Du bois W. E, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. xxiii.

The color of skin plays an important role in individual's race, it affects every phase of life, it is the master status which differentiates victim group people of color as an inferior element of the population. The lighter or whiter one's skin, the more likely one is to be categorized as Caucasian or white. The darker or browner one's, the more likely one is to be categorized as Negroid or black. In the United State being white means that one has access to the economic and psychological privileges of whiteness.<sup>133</sup> *"Color-blind racism became the dominant racial ideology as the mechanisms and practices for keeping blacks and other racial minorities at the bottom of the well"* <sup>134</sup>

The symbolism of blackness has played a critical role in determining racist perceptions of dark skinned people, according to the Western population's mind the color black symbolizes, sin, evil, dirt, and death. When they first encountered Africans via the Atlantic slave trade. The term black is *“deeply stained with dirty, soiled, foul. Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant, pertaining to or involving death, deadly, baneful, disastrous, sinister, foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked .Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to*

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133 Jones Trina, "Shades of Brown: The Law of Skin Color," *Duke Law Journal* Vol.49, No.6 (2000), pp.1487-1557.

134 Bonilla Silva Eduardo, *Racism without Racist Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), p.3.

*punishment*".<sup>135</sup> Any form or human feeling associated with blackness suggested something bad or evil.

Fanon famously states that "*whiteness has become a symbol of justice, truth, virginity. It defines what it means to be modern and human. Blackness represents ugliness, sin, darkness and immorality.*"<sup>136</sup>

John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism* refers to blackness as:

In colonial discourses, blackness has been frequently evoked as the ultimate sign of the colonizer's racial degeneracy. In the nineteenth century, throughout Europe it was commonly believed that world's population existed as a hierarchy of races based upon color, with white Europeans deemed the most civilised and black Africans as most savage<sup>137</sup>

Colorism as a term dates back to the colonial era. It coined by feminist author Alice Walker in her essay collection *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, in a chapter titled "*If the Present Looks Like the Past, What does the Future Look Like?*" Walker defined colorism as a "*prejudicial or preferential treatment of same race people based solely on their color.*"<sup>138</sup>

Skin color became a key element in the definition of notions of beauty and self-esteem within African American and black communities. It is further reinforced by mass media such as, the television, and magazines.

In *Americanah* African characters faced a lot of problems and obstacles as a result of their color. From the onset Ifemelu encounters racism. Back in Nigeria Ifemelu was not aware of her black color and it is only upon arrival in America that she becomes aware of her blackness. She says:

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135 Hall Ronald E, *An Historical Analysis of Skin Color Discrimination in America: Victimism among Victim Group Populations*(New York, Springer, 2010), p.4.

136 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, xiii.

137 McLeod John, *Beginning Postcolonialism*(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.63.

138 Webb Sarah L, "Colorism Definitions", *Colorism Healing* September 27, 2015.  
<https://colorismhealing.org/colorism-definitions/> accessed 10.03.2018.

I mean, nigger is a word that exists. People use it. It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep it out <sup>139</sup>  
Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them <sup>140</sup>

Frantz Fanon reveals the fact that black people only become aware of their blackness in the environment of a white society: *"as long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."*<sup>141</sup>

In her blog's post Ifemelu discusses her experience as an African in the United States. According to her, one only becomes black outside of Africa. *"To My Fellow Non- American Blacks: In America You Are Black, Baby"*.<sup>142</sup>

In one of the first blog entries in the novel Ifemelu writes, *"Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't black in your country? You're in America now"*<sup>143</sup>. Her aunt repeats this idea and argues that to white people all black people look similar, it does not matter where he or she is from.

Aunty Uju who is a doctor by profession faces discrimination from a white patient. While this patient was waiting for the doctor, Aunty Uju walks into the room to carry out the examination and the patient asks if the doctor is coming and when Aunty tells her that she is the doctor, the patient's face changed to *"fired clay"*<sup>144</sup> The same afternoon the patient called to transfer her file to another doctor's office.

Her cousin Dike, on the other hand, suffers so much from racism that in the end he tries to commit suicide because of his sense of otherness. For example, in school camp he is not

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139 *Americanah*,p.140.

140 *Ibid.*,p.11.

141 Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*,82.

142 *Ibid.*,p.221.

143 *Ibid.*

144 *Americanah*,p.185.

given any sunscreen because the teacher thinks it is not necessary because of his skin color. *"My group leader, Haley? she gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn't give me any. She said I didn't need it. She looked at his face, which was almost expressionless, eerily so. She did not know what to say she thought that because you're dark you don't need sunscreen. But you do. Many people don't know that dark people also need sunscreen".*<sup>145</sup>

One day, a carpet cleaner comes to the house where Ifemelu works as a babysitter. When Ifemelu opens the door *"he stiffened when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility".*<sup>146</sup> The man did not expect a non-white woman to be the owner of a prestigious house. According to America's racial system, he should be in a higher caste than her. As soon as she reveals that she is the babysitter, his hostility disappears *"his face sank into a. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be".*<sup>147</sup> The reader becomes painfully aware that there is a structure playing at hand, and it happens because she is not white.

When Ifemelu and Curt, her boyfriend, attend a party, he introduces her as his girlfriend. Some women *"looked at her with surprise, a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and in their expressions was the question why her?"*<sup>148</sup> Because in western mainstream being in a relationship with a white man subjects Ifemelu to the racially stereotyping.

She finds herself in a situation of discriminatory attitudes which suggest feelings of superiority on the part of white women. Their relationship is perfect; nonetheless, his white privilege would always cause a discomfort that would remind her of the differences between them. *"When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person race doesn't*

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145 Ibid.,p.186.

146 Ibid.,p.168.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.,p.290.

*matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters "*.<sup>149</sup>

In her blog, Ifemelu believes that the only solution for the problem of race in America is romantic love where the couple should discuss everything altogether but this could not happen in America because this type of love is hard to attain particularly in a society where black is not appreciated.

The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? romantic love not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved

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One day, Ifemelu and Ginika go shopping, the cashier asks Ginika which sales assistant helped them, she asks for all their differences but Ginika cannot describe the woman according to her skin color because in the United *"this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things"*.<sup>151</sup>

A similar incident happens to Ifemelu during her work as a babysitter at Kimberly's home, Kimberly calls all black women beautiful, which Ifemelu does not realize until one day when Kimberly says look at this beautiful woman. Ifemelu finally realizes that in America all blacks look the same .

Ifemelu would come to realize later that Kimberly used beautiful in a peculiar way. I'm meeting my beautiful friend from graduate school, Kimberly would say, or we're working with this beautiful woman on the inner-city project, and always, the women she referred to would turn out to be quite ordinary looking, but always black. One day, late that winter, when she was with Kimberly at the huge kitchen table, drinking tea and waiting for the

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149 *Americanah*, p.288.

150 *Ibid.*, p.294.

151 *Ibid.*, p.130.

children to be brought back from an outing with their grandmother, Kimberly said, Oh, look at this beautiful woman, and pointed at a plain model in a magazine whose only distinguishing feature was her very dark skin<sup>152</sup>

In the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' Fanon remembers how he felt in France when white strangers pointed out his blackness with derogatory phrases such as dirty nigger :

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematisation. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together.<sup>153</sup>

In her first blog Ifemlelu describes her experience as a non-American black and she tries to show the different racial classification that can be found in America. For instance, "*Zippered-Up Negroes are black people who do not discuss racial issues*".<sup>154</sup> Generally, Ifemelu focuses on her observations on and experiences with race that discovers in America upon her arrival.

Skin color is important in Nigeria too for instance, Ginika is a so-called half-caste and has a lighter skin, and is therefore considered to be beautiful. "*She had caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like. Each year, she was voted prettiest girl in their form, and she would wryly say, "It's just because I'm a half-caste. How can I be finer than Zainab"*".<sup>155</sup>

Although skin color is important; does not seem to affect people. It only becomes important when it turns into race when she moves to the United States.

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152 *Americanah*,p.149.

153 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*,58.

154 *Ibid.*,p.303.

155 *Americanah*,p.59.

After she returns home, she says, “*I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black*”<sup>156</sup> as if she emphasizes the idea that someone's skin color plays an important role just outside. Blaine asks her if she is still blogging about race and she answers: “no, just about life. Race doesn't really work here.”

One morning, Curt picks up Ifemelu's copy of *Essence* magazine ;an African American lifestyle magazine that seeks to celebrate black women's beauty ,a big conversation that occurs between them about this magazine;

This magazine's kind of racially skewed, he said.  
What?  
Come on. Only black women featured?  
You're serious, she said.  
He looked puzzled. Yeah.  
We're going to the bookstore.  
What?  
I need to show you something. Don't ask <sup>157</sup>

She drags him to the bookstore and grabs a stack of women's magazines. She makes him count the black women page by page because black women rarely appear in these magazines even they do women that appear are often light skinned or biracial not black.

Look, all of them are white women. This one is supposed to be Hispanic, we know this because they wrote two Spanish words here, but she looks exactly like this white woman, no difference in her skin tone and hair and features. Now, I'm going to flip through, page by page, and you tell me how many black women you see. And so he counted. Three black women he said, finally. Or maybe four. She could be black. So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous”<sup>158</sup>

When Ifemelu visits a beauty spa to have her eyebrows, the woman in the salon does not serve her with the excuse that “*We don't do curly*”<sup>159</sup>; curly is used to mean black or African.

And only when Curt arrives to intervene and warns to shut down the salon .The woman

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156 Ibid.,p.461.

157 Ibid.,p.292.

158 *Americanah*,p.293.

159 Ibid.,p.289.

apologizes that “*it was a misunderstanding*”.<sup>160</sup> It is a form of discrimination that most female immigrants suffer from and have been denied opportunities because of the color of their skin.

The next section shall discuss how black hair is still a highly controversial topic among African Americans and black communities due to many pressures that shaped their hair choice in various ways; it is depicted carefully as a powerful metaphor of racism in twenty first century.

### **3. The Hair Symbol and its Politics**

Over the past century, hair has received considerable attention in academic circles among psychoanalysts, sociologists, and anthropologists. The debates that scholars engage in are clearly indicative of real world tension when you have good hair, of course you are happy about it and you feel special and more privileged than those who do not have good hair. People who don't have good hair are envious of those who do. " *Good hair, used to describe hair on a black person's head, means hair that looks European, straight, not too curly, not that kinky.*"<sup>161</sup>

Hair matters in black communities, and it matters in different ways for women and men. For black women in this society, what is considered desirable and undesirable hair is based on one's hair texture. What is desirable is measured against white standards of beauty, which include long and straight hair (usually blonde), that is, hair that is not kinky or nappy. Consequently, black women's hair, in general, fits outside of what is considered desirable in mainstream society. Within black communities, straighter variety and texture are privileged as well. Such hair is described as good, while kinky, nappy hair is bad “*I don't like my hair because it's just too Nappy, it's too kinky.*”<sup>162</sup>

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160 Ibid.

161 Mercer Kobena, "Black Hair/Style Politics," *New Formations*, No.3 (1987), pp.33-54; p.35.

162 Bank Ingrid, *Hair Matters Beauty, Power and Black Women's Consciousness* (New York, New York University Press, 2000),p.48.

Kinky hair was glorified in African societies; it became a symbol of inferiority once Africans reached American shores. Hair is second only to skin color as a racial signifier. It reached its height of politicization during the Black Power Movement. The Afro as a symbol of black pride of “Black is Beautiful!” affirming everything that is natural was just as important to the movement as black self-determination. The goal was to move black people to a place where they were proud of black skin and hair texture, black women were rejected in the acceptance of the “Black is Beautiful” idea. The pressing comb and chemical relaxers became oppressive because they were tools that symbolized the shame associated with black hair in its natural state. Straightening the hair became symbolic of self-hatred in the eyes of those in the movement.<sup>163</sup>

In Western societies that they are, in various instances, black woman wears her hair can determine what kind of job she can have and whether or not she can keep the job. Because it is harder for black women with natural hair to secure jobs. Hair is the most tangible sign of racial difference and the frizzy hair is an essential aspect of the picture of inferiority.

Hair type rapidly became the real symbolic badge of slavery, although like many powerful symbols it was disguised<sup>164</sup> because blacks are judged on their hair. Basically the long, straight hair people are more favorable. The shorter, kinkier, nappier hair, the less favoritism is shown<sup>165</sup>

For that reason, in this sense, straightening hair among black women, along with chemical relaxers, it has remained the most constant practice since the early twentieth century.

Hair, particularly Ifemelu’s hair, is used frequently in the novel, whether braided, relaxed, or natural to represents her state in America, The novel begins in Trenton's hair salon

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163 Ibid.,p.42.

164 Ibid.,p. 8.

165 *Americanah*,p.29.

though Ifemelu lives in Princeton, New Jersey, she must travel to another city to have her hair braided *"to braid her hair for the journey home."*<sup>166</sup>

Ifemelu understands that in Princeton there was no necessity to have a hair salon for blacks because most of them are light skinned. *"The few black locals she had seen were so light skinned and lank haired that a braiding salon would not be necessary "*.<sup>167</sup>

The braiding salon itself is a Pan-African enterprise, with female employees and customers from Nigeria, Ghana, the Caribbean, and more. The salon functions more like Africa than America, with Nigerian movies playing on TV.

Much of *Americanah* takes place as [Ifemelu](#) sits in a salon getting her hair braided. For Ifemelu personally, her hair represents her struggle for confidence and an identity as both a Nigerian immigrant and a black American. In Nigeria, Ifemelu always braided her hair, but when she comes to America she learns that she is supposed to relax her hair with chemicals.

After Ifemelu graduating from university, she started searching for a professional job but she decided to take out her braids because hair is an essential part of a person's appearance, which is usually judged according to white standards of beauty, and job applicants are expected to look professional for instance, Auntie Uju advises by Kemi to relax her hair before going to the interview;

I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.  
So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?  
Ifemelu asked.

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166 Ibid.,p.15.

167 Ibid.,p.10.

I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed. Aunty Uju reply<sup>168</sup>

In her blog post "A Michelle Obama shout out Plus Hair as race Metaphor" , Ifemelu writes :

Some black women would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair. Because, you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal<sup>169</sup>

Although Ifemelu has worn braids her whole life, she submits to America standards and gets her hair straightened using chemicals and heat tools. Her hairdresser declares that after relaxing her hair *"but look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white girl swing!"*<sup>170</sup>

When Ifemelu gets a job interview, her advisor tells her she needs to straighten her hair, so she does. This happens following advice from her friend Ruth too who tells her before attending the job interview in Baltimore: *"my only advice? lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of thing but it matters. We want you to get that job."*<sup>171</sup> Her resulting hair is described as hanging down, as if it were defeated or sad .Thus, as Ifemelu sacrifices her natural hair to submit to American beauty standards.

When she does so, she feels that a part of herself has died with her hair's natural curl. Thus the cultural pressure for black women like Ifemelu to straighten, dye, or somehow make their hair look more like a white woman's hair becomes a symbol of the racism inherent in American culture.

The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss<sup>172</sup>

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168 *Americanah*,p.123.

169 *Ibid.*,p.294.

170 *Ibid.*,p.467.

171 *Americanah*,p.203.

172 *Ibid.*, p.204.

Ifemelu explains that hair much like race was never a thing for her before she moved to the United States. This is reflected in the way that black women straightening their hair became indicative of one's race identity only after she moved to the U.S. In Nigeria everyone had kinky, natural hair.

Ifemelu tries to relax her hair at home, since these products are sold at the chemist's, but she cannot achieve a good result and decides to go to the hairdresser. Alongside the pain she feels, another consequence of the relaxer is that part of her hair starts to fall out. The hairdresser said:

Girl, you need a professional, the hairdresser said as she reapplied another relaxer. People think they're saving money by doing it at home but they're really not. Ifemelu felt only a slight burning, at first, but as the hairdresser rinsed out the relaxer, Ifemelu's head bent backwards against a plastic sink, needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp, down to different parts of her body, back up to her head<sup>173</sup>. Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek<sup>174</sup>

After that Ifemelu advises by Wambui to cut her hair "*It's the chemicals,*" Wambui told her. "*Do you know what's in a relaxer? That stuff can kill you. You need to cut your hair and go natural.*"<sup>175</sup> She convinced her, Ifemelu takes a pair of scissors and starts cutting her hair, when she finishes, she looks in the mirror, she astonishes by her new look "*Ifemelu looked in the mirror. She was all big eyes and big head. At best, she looked like a boy; at worst, like an insect. I look so ugly I'm scared of myself.*"<sup>176</sup>

Wambui herself changes the style of her hair; she takes away her braids even though she argues that relaxing one's hair "*is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you.*"<sup>177</sup> But she relaxes it in order to seem more professional.

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173 Ibid.

174 Ibid.

175 *Americanh*, p.209.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., p.113.

Aunty Uju also when she goes to America ,her hair changes to "*scruffy braids*"<sup>178</sup> ,Ifemelu comments on how "*America had subdued her*"<sup>179</sup> ,before her life was not complicated and she did not really struggle with her hair. Ifemelu was smiling at Uju for relaxing her hair in order to please her employer.

Curt, Ifemelu's boyfriend comments on her new style and seems to be angry because he considers that Ifemelu seems to be beautiful with her natural hair.

Why do you have to do this? Your hair was gorgeous braided. And when you took out the braids the last time and just kind of let it be? It was even more gorgeous, so full and cool<sup>180</sup>

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky<sup>181</sup>

At home, her aunt Uju also questions her new hairstyle, since she cannot understand how Ifemelu's boyfriend. "*You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that.*"<sup>182</sup> At her workplace, she is also asked whether her hair means something political, since natural hair or Afro have historically been associated with the Black Power Movement of the Sixties and radical political thinking. "*She went to work, her hair a very short, overly combed and overly oiled Afro. "You look different, her co-workers said, all of them a little tentative. Does it mean anything? Like, something political?"*"<sup>183</sup>

when Ifemelu cuts off her damaged hair to start fresh with her natural hair ; she learns to love and care for her natural hair, she goes to the drugstore, she bought oils and pomades, applying one and then the other, on wet hair and then on dry hair, willing an unknown miracle to happen. Something that would make her like her hair. She thought of buying a wig, but

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178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.,p.114.

180 Ibid.,p205.

181 Ibid.,p.213.

182 *Americanah*,p.213

183 Ibid.

wigs brought anxiety, the always present possibility of flying off your head. *"She looked in the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair".*<sup>184</sup>

She reached for her phone and sent Wambui a text: *"I hate my hair. I couldn't go to work today."*<sup>185</sup> Wambui's reply came minutes later: *"Go online. HappilyKinkyNappy.com. It's this natural hair community. You'll find inspiration."*<sup>186</sup> It is a website where women can get tips, and advice on how to deal with their hair. In this website Ifemelu shares her experience with her hair.

They complained about black magazines never having natural haired women in their pages, about drugstore products so poisoned by mineral oil that they could not moisturize natural hair. They traded recipes. They sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal. And Ifemelu fell into this world with a tumbling gratitude<sup>187</sup>

In this website, women with hair as short as hers had a name for, *TWA, Teeny Weeny Afro*<sup>188</sup>. She learned from women who posted long instructions, to avoid shampoos with silicones, to use a leave in conditioner on wet hair, to sleep in a satin scarf. Curt fascinated about it . He read posts on HappilyKinkyNappy.com. *"I think it's great!"* he said. *"It's like this movement of black women."*<sup>189</sup>

Ifemelu has always tried to accept and stand by her hair, She realized that there are more women who appreciate the beauty of natural hair, she learns to truly like it. She always remembering Jumila's post, *" I love the sistas who love their straight weaves, but I'm never putting horse hair on my head again"*<sup>190</sup>Jamilah's words made her remember that there is nothing more beautiful than what God gave her.

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184 Ibid.,p.214.

185 Ibid.,p.210.

186 Ibid.

187 *Americanah*,p.210.

188 Ibid.,p.213.

189 Ibid.

190 Ibid.,p.214.

In America Ifemelu are forced to give up their true identity in order to succeed and always have to hide in this disguise. Later, the pretending will turn out to be a prison and their identity will get more and more conflicted and make them suffer.

Once Ifemelu moved back to Nigeria, she connected with her friends who also returned back from America and decided to wear their natural hair, *"they talked about hair salons here, where the hairdressers struggled and fumbled to comb natural hair, as though it were an alien eruption, as though their own hair was not the same way before it was defeated by chemicals."*<sup>191</sup>

Electing a black president in America is important since the ones in favour of Obama think he will change the ongoing racism and separation between blacks and whites that is enrooted in American history .But still the question arises if the US ready for a black president and if the future could be different from the past.

#### **4. BARACK OBAMA'S ELECTION**

*"There is a strange kind of enigma associated with the problem of racism. No one, or almost no one, wishes to see themselves as racist; still, racism persists, real and tenacious."*

Memmi Albert, *Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 3.

Throughout history, America has been knowing for its richness and diversity of cultures, races, ethnicities and nationalities especially racial struggles between whites and African Americans due to the racial vacuum that becomes more severe in recent decades.

A remarkable reduction in racial inequality has occurred in America. A smaller number of social scientists believe that race continues to play a role similar to the one it played in the

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191 Ibid.,p.395.

past. For these authors, little has changed in America in terms of racism and there is a general pessimism in the prospects of changing the racial status of minorities.<sup>192</sup>

Racism still exists and is embedded in the social structure of a society, though its expression is becoming more symbolic and implicit. The 2008 presidential election witnessed the unprecedented coming into power of the first mixed race president and the first black lady. Their victory has been celebrated as the radiant light for the ultimate liberation of black people. And Michelle Obama, though highly controversial during the presidential campaign, has been crowned as a pioneer for the black women to flout the demeaning white standard of beauty that has dominated public discourse for centuries. Michelle Obama, *"a first lady in black who challenges the patriarchal stereotype not to mention the racial construction of the femme ideal in the midst of chaotic worldwide change and a demographic transformation that is changing the face of the nation. Unsurprisingly, she has become a target."*<sup>193</sup>

Barack Obama's run for presidency raised an unavoidable question to all voters on November 4, 2008: *"is the country ready for a black president?"*<sup>194</sup> Understandably, race often is a forbidden or at least uneasy topic for the American public. But as many scholarly works have shown, race has always defined American political development. On the night of his electoral victory, spontaneous crowds of joyful celebrants rushed into streets, parks, and public establishments in thousands of venues across the country. In Harlem, over ten thousand people surrounded the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building, cheering and crying in disbelief. To many, the impressive margin of Obama's popular vote victory suggested the possibility that the United States had entered at long last an age of postracial politics, in which leadership and major public policy debates would not be distorted by factors of race and ethnicity.<sup>195</sup>

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192 Bonilla, *Racism without Racist*, 26.

193 Marable Manning and Clarke Kristen, *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black American's New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.126.

194 Liu Baodong, *The Election of Barack Obama :How He Won*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.8.

195 Ibid., p.1.

According to many observers, the coming of Barack Obama to U.S. presidency has opened a new epoch in U.S. politics since it seemed to put an end to the long civil rights struggle in which race would no longer exist or stand as an obstacle to opportunities or achievements. Obama himself embraced this imagery, beginning with his Democratic National Convention speech in 2004 when he states, “*there is not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America there’s the United States of America*”<sup>196</sup> and continuing through his speech on race during the 2008 campaign. In his race speech “*A More Perfect Union*”,<sup>197</sup> delivered in Philadelphia at the National Constitution Center .Obama admitted the history of racial separation and discord in the past denying the operation of racism that contains institutional kinds of discrimination against a group of people based on their physical traits starting with their skin tone, disallowed race as an important aspect of politics or society, and anticipated a future in which racial differences would eventually disappear.

Obama’s strategic approach on race was indeed original, but coming at a time of hopelessness and pessimism among many African Americans, there were doubts that the young Illinois senator could actually pull it off. To some, Obama’s multiracial pedigree raised questions about his loyalties to the cause of black people. Curiously, many of those with the loudest queries were African American Conservatives and Republicans, whose own bonafides on racial matters were often under fire. For example, Conservative writer Debra Dickerson, author of *The End of Blackness*, declared in January 2007 that “*Obama would be the great black hope in the next presidential race, if he were actually black.*” Journalist Stanley Crouch took a similarly negative approach, arguing that while Obama “*has experienced some light versions of typical racial stereotypes, he cannot claim those problems as his own nor has he lived the life of a black American.*” Juan Williams, the Conservative

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196 Ibid.,p.8.

197 Ibid.

commentator on Fox News, warned that “*there are widespread questions whether this son of a white American mother and a black Kenyan father really understands the black American experience.*”<sup>198</sup>

For blacks, Obama asserted, the path forward “*means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past .It means binding our particular grievances for better health care, and better schools, and better jobs to the larger aspirations of all Americans*”.<sup>199</sup>

The Obama victory will be of great assistance in waging the struggle for racial justice.

Race continues to be regarded as a dilemma in American institutional life, in the context of the United States, race seems to operate as an immutable category, characterized by color lines between white people and non white people that have been defined, circumscribed, and enforced institutionally.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her novel *Americanah* explains the issues of race and racism. Ifemelu the protagonist migrates to America to study and in the end she becomes blogs writer concerning race in America.Despite the racial progress, Obama’s election represents Adichie uses Barack Obama’s coming into the presidency and Ifemelu’s opinions about him to prove America’s increasing racial approval as well as showing that racism still exists and deeply effects America .Adichie through her novel believes that the country has advanced in regards to racial differences after the coming of Barack Obama into presidency.

During the period around the election, Ifemelu is dating Blaine. When first asked whom she supports, she says: “*I like Hillary Clinton. I don’t really know anything about this Obama guy*”,<sup>200</sup> his colleagues at the faculty all support Obama. However, they are not sure whether white people and the nation are ready for a black president. Later, when Ifemelu has become an enthusiastic supporter of Obama, she writes in a blog post entitled Even the Idea of Being Ready is Ridiculous:

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198 Marable and Clarke ,*Barack Obama and African American Empowerment*,5.

199 Ibid.,p.7.

200*Americanah*,p.324.

In a blog post written during the final, frenzied lap of the presidential campaign: Even the Idea of Being Ready Is Ridiculous. Does nobody see how absurd it is to ask people if they are ready for a black president? Are you ready for Mickey Mouse to be president?<sup>201</sup>

Blaine and Ifemelu feel “*new passion, outside of themselves, that united them in an intimacy they had never before, an unfixed, unspoken intuitive intimacy: Barack Obama they agreed, without any prodding, without the shadows of obligation or compromise, on Barack Obama.*”<sup>202</sup> Together they follow the news, read his biography, Ifemelu posts regularly about Obama and his wife, while Blaine becomes a volunteer in the presidential. He insists that “*Obama is benefiting not because he’s black, but because he’s a different kind of black*”<sup>203</sup> because Obama is multiracial, and well-educated.

Later, Adichie goes deeper into the racial aspect of Obama’s candidature. It is discussed that Obama benefits from being black in the elections “*if he wins, he will no longer be black, just as Oprah is no longer black, she’s Oprah. So she can go where black people are loathed and be fine. He’ll no longer be black, he’ll just be Obama*”.<sup>204</sup> This suggests that if a black person achieves something, but rather he or she is regarded as an exceptional case and from then on, this person’s most prominent trait is not any longer his or her skin color. Blaine once explains that Obama’s success also depends on the “*different kind of black*”<sup>205</sup> that he is. Having a white mother and having been raised in different countries “*make him somehow a bit like everyone, if he was just a plain black guy from Georgia, it would be different.*”<sup>206</sup> When Obama gives a speech about race in which he, according to Blaine “*equate black grievance and white fear*”.<sup>207</sup> Grace, one of Blaine’s colleagues, thinks that it “*was not done to open up*

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201 Ibid., p.295.

202 *Americanah*, p. 346.

203 Ibid., p.350.

204 Ibid., p.349.

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid., p.351.

*a conversation about race but actually to close it. He can only win if he avoids race. We all know that”* .<sup>208</sup>

The complex topic of Obama’s race is analyzed by Ifemelu in a blog post titled “*Obama Can Win Only If He Remains the Magic Negro*”.<sup>209</sup> Ifemelu says that a Magic Negro “*The black man who is eternally wise and kind. He never reacts under great suffering, never gets angry, is never threatening. He always forgives all kinds of racist shit. He teaches the white person how to break down the sad but understandable prejudice in his heart. You see this man in many films. And Obama is straight from central casting*”.<sup>210</sup> Because Obama’s race alone would place him on the bottom of the racial hierarchy, Ifemelu says that in America, “*White is always on top, American Black is always on the bottom, and what’s in the middle depends on time and place*”.<sup>211</sup>

People are opposed to the idea of a black president, not the idea of this particular man as president because electing a black man to the presidency would go against the structure of white power present in American politics. She writes that “*people abhorred not the man that Barack Obama was, but the idea of him as president*”.<sup>212</sup> In her blog someone comments that “*somebody put a bullet in this guy send him back to the African jungle. A black man will never be in the white house, dude, it’s called the white house for a reason.*”<sup>213</sup>

Ifemelu shows how the initial enthusiasm and hope gradually fall apart, Obama is presented as wearing his black skin color just as an accessory, he cannot yet truly represent his kind. However, when Ifemelu learns about the victory of Obama,

On television, Barack Obama and Michelle Obama and their two young daughters were walking onto a stage. They were carried by the wind, bathed in incandescent light, victorious and smiling. Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white Hispanic,

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208 Ibid.

209 Ibid., p.317.

210 *Americanah*, p.317.

211 Ibid., p.187.

212 Ibid., p.348.

213 Ibid., p.347.

Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled Americans have sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of red states and blue states. We have been and always will be the United States of America. Barack Obama's voice rose and fell, his face solemn, and around him the large and resplendent crowd of the hopeful. Ifemelu watched, mesmerized. And there was, at that moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America<sup>214</sup>

In one of her blog posts entitled "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor"<sup>215</sup>, she noted that the ideal of beauty is to have straight hair and white skin because "you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal".<sup>216</sup>

Ifemelu comments that if Michelle Obama were to ever appear on television with her natural hair "Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of woolly hair, or tight spirally curls. There is no knowing what her texture will be. It is not unusual for a black woman to have three different textures on her head. She would totally rock but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote."<sup>217</sup> She explains that because America abides by white beauty standards, the natural hair of a black woman is not normal. This is important because Barack Obama's family is often seen as an extension of himself, as evidenced by Ifemelu's assertion that the Michelle's appearance would affect her husband's chances in the election. "White girlfriend and I are Michelle Obama groupies. So the other day I say to her I wonder if Michelle Obama has a weave, her hair looks fuller today, and all that heat every day must damage it. And she says you mean her hair doesn't grow like that? So is it me or is that the perfect metaphor for race in America right there?"<sup>218</sup>

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214 Ibid.,p.345.

215 *Americanah*,p.294.

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid.,p.295.

218 Ibid.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In sum, racism is a plague that sneaks into the human mind and constructs a false belief that one person is inferior to another and worthless of living a free and independent life. This false belief leads to further shifts in the behavior of one person towards other races. Stereotyping appears in the frame, injustice begins to operate within societies and barriers rise between races within the same society.

Adichie's literary corpus not only flaunts a globalized Nigeria but has also created an alcove for her fellow Nigerians on the literary platform of the cosmos. Adichie explores the intersection of the personal and the public by placing the intimate details of the lives of her characters within the larger social and political forces in contemporary Nigeria. *Americanah* sketches the lives of Nigerian youth who migrated to America for education in quest of the great American dream. She has tried to explicate the relevant issues of émigré Nigerians such as alienation, loneliness and protagonists' search for their identity intertwined with grief and sacrifice and which is truly representative of a black identity.

In the first chapter, we have provided an overview of the underlying socio-historical and theoretical background. In the first part of this dissertation, we briefly outlined the socio-historical background and the long history of racial inequality in the United States. In the second part, we provided some theoretical background information, relevant to the subsequent analysis of the selected novel, *Americanah*.

In the second and practical part of our dissertation, we analysed the selected novel *Americanah* by applying different theories. We have divided the content analysis into the following themes: migration, identity, hair symbol and its politics, skin color and Obama's election.

For centuries whites used extensive violence from chains and whippings to lynching to keep African Americans racially subordinated. Such violence was a recurring part of enslavement and Jim Crow subordination. In the US being a black means always having to be prepared for anti-black actions by whites in most places and at many times of the day, week, month, or year. Being black means living with various types of racial discrimination and their often severe impacts, from cradle to grave. This lifetime reality is also true for most other Americans of color. We observe constantly in the examples of discrimination.

Racial inequality a very realistic issue that faces thousands of Africans all over the world, especially in America, The numbers of African immigrants are rapidly increasing annually and Nigerians are at the top of the diagram of African immigration to the United States of America. Mostly, Nigerians began to go to America seeking education and to advance themselves not knowing that they are walking steadily towards a sick society. In other words, It's a familiar situation for most post-colonial Third World inevitable, practically this idea that some form of the good life must be found outside the borders of their corrupt and backward birth country: preferably in the West . In America, Africans no longer have full and absolute freedom; they have to abide by the role given to them and abide by the American mind and behavior. They have to imitate Americans in desperate attempts of becoming equal to them and not being noticed as odd. African immigrants are all exposed to inferiority, submission and injustice, whether in the treatment of Americans, or positions at work or any kind of social experience. Thus, Africans mistreated and stereotyped as inferior social classes.

Americans are very concerned with the differences that distinguish one race from the other race, they notice the looks rather than the attitudes, they notice your skin color, your hair, your accent and even the size of your lips. Life in America is weird; painful that emerges when different groups of people live together in a system shaped to maintain the dominance of one group over others.

Adichie creates a sequence of fictional events based on the experiences of millions of Africans in the United States in order to manifest the racist nature of the American society and the dilemma of Africans there, and also to assert that women are usually persecuted, mistreated and oppressed rather than being treated as free and independent human beings.

Adichie has knitted different elements of the contemporary society as symbols to reflect her attitudes starting with displacement which brings a sense of unbelonging for Ifemelu and Obinze therefore, in order to overcome this sense of unbelonging, they revive their African hood via returning to their mother land, and African values, and expressing their sense of belonging to Nigeria. Since Ifemelu and Obinze put a lot of thought into imagining and planning their lives .Eventually, upon their return to Nigeria. However, their migration stories do not simply end here. The reader realizes how their experiences as migrants marked them to the point that they perceive their homeland as foreign. They end up in a situation where they do not belong to any place and where they cannot identify with any social group.

Immigrant's obsession with America was conditioned by advertisements and literature and ultimately rendered them to dream about only a life there. Adichie suggests that immigrants critically engage with the media coverage about America and to acknowledge that America, like any other country, is flawed, even if it is presented as immaculate. The characters' idealization convinces them that life abroad will offer them better opportunities. They have ascribed a racial identity which they did not have prior to their emigration. Both Ifemelu and Aunty Uju become black in the United States and, more importantly, are confronted with mostly negative stereotypes about the color of their skin.

Ifemelu's engagement with the host land troubles and eventually transcends the boundaries placed upon her person as a result of her skin color, hair texture. She is a woman of strong determination because she does not only overcomes her inner turmoil and physical ordeals but also gives voice to her anti-racist ideas through her blogs.

Ifemelu during her identity formation, she learns that race and class are still discriminatory institutions used to categorize and control marginalized groups. In her effort to feel less like an outsider, Ifemelu begins faking an American accent. She realizes that naturally kinky hair is a subject worth blogging about. She notices that Michelle Obama never appears in public with her natural hair because it's not professional, and then feels ashamed and resolves to .stop

Before themes like kinky hair, caramel skin, and full figured body have never been so powerfully portrayed in fiction before Adichie and it is here that the aggressive struggle for African identity on the international level is displayed.

With the advent of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Nigerian diasporic literature has attained new heights of global readership and critical acclaim at the same time through her depiction of lives of Africans in the United States of America. She not only sensitizes the readers about racism but also gives voice to the millions of non-resident Nigerians who have undergone identical feelings of nostalgia and rootlessness.

Throughout *Americanah* Ifemelu gets subjected to the racially stereotyping gaze almost everywhere she goes. She gets generalized and marginalized because of the way she looks and speaks. Upon her arrival to Nigeria her friends call her Americanah which is used for Nigerians who dream of being American citizens.

*Americanah* is a book that describes the unlivable nature of the American dream for minorities and the unwelcome status of such people in the US. It proposes a strong consideration of return as the only recourse when the inevitable, sustained, and intractable strangle of anti-black racism becomes unbearable.

Adichie in this novel opened a possibility for her readers to engage in a cross-cultural conversation, and to finally have that honest talk about America's racial reality. She refers to many significant events from African American history and to the reality of black people in

the US, and of black women in particular. *Americanah* thus becomes a perfect text in order to explore issues of racial identity and beauty.

*Americanah* is a key text in understanding that race still matters in 2013 and that colorism, hairism and identity are still very much problems in the twenty-first century. It serves a gentle reminder that racism is very much alive and growing stronger and stronger although Obama's election.

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## الملخص

هذه الأطروحة تعرض رؤية داخلية عامة في وصف لقضايا مثل العرق، الهجرة، الضياع، الوحدة، الهوية ووضع الإنسان الإفريقي في أمريكا في رواية شيما ماندا نغوزي اديشي امريكانا (2013). إنها تثير أسئلة مهمة حول طبيعة العنصرية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية خلال القرن الحادي والعشرين. إنها تعطي وصفا صادقا للتاريخ الطويل للمساواة العرقية التي تواجه المهاجرين في الأراضي المضيفة، مواقف البيض تجاه قضايا مثل لون البشرة، تركيبة الشعر، الهوية، وكيف لا تزال هذه القضايا مهمة من حيث الجمال والنجاح. يتم دراسة الرواية دراسة تحليلية موضوعية وأسلوبية. الأدب لا يمكن عزله عن الخلفية التاريخية ولهذا السبب، الفصل الأول يسلط الضوء على القضايا الاجتماعية التاريخية والحقائق التي تحيط وتؤثر على كتابة هذه الرواية، ويلفت الانتباه إلى المعلومات الأساسية للخلفية النظرية المناسبة لتحليل هذه الرواية من أجل وضع القاعدة. في الفصل الثاني نقوم بدراسة السبل التي يمكن لرواية امريكانا أن تساعد في توسيع فهم العنصرية والهجرة في الولايات المتحدة. الهدف الرئيسي هنا هو إظهار أن المشاكل العرقية المختلفة لا تزال موجودة في أمريكا لأن العديد من الناس مازالوا يعتقدون أن انتخاب الرئيس الأسود قد أزال أربعمئة سنة من العبودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجرة، العنصرية، لون البشرة، تركيبة الشعر، الهوية، عقدة النقص.

## RESUME

Cette dissertation offre un aperçu intérieur de la description des sujets tels que la race, l'immigration, la perte, la solitude, l'identité et la position de l'Africain en Amérique dans le roman de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Americanah* (2013). Il évoque des questions importantes sur la nature du racisme aux États-Unis d'Amérique pendant le dix-neuvième siècle. Il donne une description véridique de la longue histoire de l'inégalité raciale qui affronte les immigrants dans les pays d'accueil, les attitudes des blancs face à des sujets tels que la couleur de la peau, la texture des cheveux, l'identité et comment ces sujets encore posent un problème au terme de beauté et succès. Le roman sélectionné est étudié thématiquement et stylistiquement. La littérature ne peut pas être détachée du contexte historique; c'est pourquoi, le premier chapitre met en lumière les enjeux socio-historiques et les réalités qui entourent et affectent l'écriture du roman, il attire l'attention sur les informations théoriques pertinentes à l'analyse du roman choisi afin de donner une base. Dans le deuxième chapitre, nous examinons le roman d'Adichie *Americanah* peut aider à élargir la compréhension du racisme et de l'immigration aux États-Unis. L'objectif principale ici est de montrer que les différents problèmes raciaux existent toujours en Amérique parce que beaucoup des gens croient encore .que l'élection du président noir efface quatre cents ans d'esclavage

**Mots clés:** immigration, racisme, couleur de la peau, texture des cheveux, identité, complexe .d'infériorité