

Displacement, Social Identity and Nigrescence in Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

*The African diaspora has been enjoying a massive attention throughout history and their struggles have been depicted through literary works for centuries. This led to the emergence of African writers who wrote about the African immigrants' experiences from a more authentic perspective in order to deconstruct the single story and the stereotypes that the Westerners have built against Africans. Through the examination of Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), I attempt firstly to examine the effects of displacement on African immigrants as depicted in the novel. Secondly, to investigate the impact of the social identifications and categorizations on African immigrants as portrayed in *Americanah* based on the Social Identity Theory (SIT). Finally, to discover the process through which African immigrants manage to accept their black identity. This objective will be achieved via the examination of the main characters in *Americanah* according to the Nigrescence theory which reflects on the process of becoming black.*

Key words: *Adichie, Americanah, Postcolonial, Social Identity Theory (SIT), Nigrescence.*

1. Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a well-known and an outspoken Nigerian writer who re-examined the American dream through the eyes of a Nigerian immigrant, Ifemelu. In her novel *Americanah* (2013), she rejected and dismantled the single story of both America and Africa. Adichie's concept of the single story is derived from her famous TED talk in 2009 entitled "The Danger of a Single Story." It has drastically altered the readers' way of thinking as we became more aware of the importance of not building up a narrowed story of a certain ethnicity, culture or a country because, **"stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize"** (Adichie 2009). Adichie re-constructed the depiction of America as the country where dreams come true and Africa where people are starving and dying from famine. From one hand, Africans have always been full of migrating delusions to the United States believing that it is there where they will finally realize their dreams and live a better life. Americans on the other hand, do not bother themselves to differentiate between the African countries and they rather consider Africa as a single entity.

Immigrants find themselves caught and entrapped in the dilemma of choosing between the new or the traditional culture, the new or the old world. By leaving their country, they face alienation and displacement which is a key concept in the postcolonial theory. Displacement occurs when a "specific cultural population is moved from its original homeland or bioregion and relocated to a different setting" (Mani, 2018, 44). Unlike those who suffered due to the forced uprootedness and they were subjected to during slavery and the colonial era, present day immigrants are considered to be more educated and more aware about the process of voluntary immigration.

However, they feel displaced, alienated and dislocated once they reach their dream land and become culturally shocked because of the considerable hardships and frustrations in the new world. With its fluid nature, immigration prevents people from enjoying a fixed, stable identity after being exposed to the drastic changes because identity cannot be separated and isolated from the new, exotic social context, “human identity is not only natural and stable but constructed and occasionally even invented outright” (Said, 1979, 332).

It is evident how identity is shaped through the cultural milieu and cannot be dissociated from the social changes and the new environment. The Black identity specifically is deeply and strongly related to the blacks’ historical circumstances throughout the eras of slavery and colonialism. All these historical conditions transform Blacks’ identity and they can never detach their present from what their ancestors previously went through. The interwoven relationship between identity and society was the crucial pivot for the foundation of Tajfel & Turner’s Social Identity Theory (SIT) which they used to understand the nature that ties the individual with society. The initial purpose behind the Social Identity Theory was to figure out the psychological reasons that lead individuals to in-group discrimination (Haslam, 2004, 18). The use of this social psychological theory will help us understand the changes that Africans go through after immigration. The new social context of immigrants entails their social identification and categorization to a given social group and sometimes they can identify themselves with multiple social groups.

Moreover, the discourse of Black identity has been witnessing the birth of scholars who focus on the psychology of Blacks and contributed to the emergence of the Nigrescence Theory. Nigrescence is derived from the French term “*la négrescence*” which is the literal meaning for *becoming black* (Vandiver, 2001, 166). The Nigrescence Theory was originally introduced by William E. Cross, Jr. in 1971 where he proposed the original model characterized with five stages of black identity. However, Cross revised the Nigrescence model and made some changes in his *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (1991). He explains the alterations that people experience as reflected in the stages of identity development highlighting that, “Nigrescence models begin with people who place *low* salience on being Black, but in the aftermath of a challenging encounter... move to find a way to *change* their identity to make it reflect *high* salience for race” (123). The employment of this theory on the immigrant characters of the selected literary work enables us to establish a solid framework to figure out the process through which African immigrants finally embrace their black identity.

2. The Dream of Displacement

If you’re white, you’re all right;
if you’re brown, stick around;
if you’re black, get back!
(Adichie, 2013, 184)

Ifemelu is portrayed as a strong minded female throughout the novel since she was a teenager in Nigeria and after she grew up in America. The narration of the novel is told through the voice of Ifemelu in the form of flashbacks where she relives the past and retells the story of her life, her friends and her ex-boyfriend Obinze. As most of the teenagers in Nigeria who are, “drunk with American ambitions” (Adichie, 2013, 27), Ifemelu escapes the educational and economic instability and she wins a scholarship to finish her studies in America. She joins Auntie Uju and her son Dike hoping to live in the magical places which she used to see in commercials and TV shows, “she began to dream. She sees herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease” (99). Ifemelu does not appreciate her African culture only after being subjected to racism which is highly emphasized by Adichie in order to raise awareness about all what is African.

Ifemelu, as many other Nigerians or previously colonized people, has lived under the influence of the Western ideologies which built a sense of inferiority and self-degradation, “to hear “Nigeria” and “good” in one sentence was a luxury” (13), instilling the idea that the West is the Best, “I read American books because America is the future” (70). They grow up absorbing the single story told about America until their brains become programmed to automatically believe everything they hear and see, “It was the commercials that captivated her. She aches for the lives they showed, lives full of bliss, where all problems had sparkling solutions... and in her mind they became the real America” (113). Immigrating to the United States was regarded as a privilege that everyone is dreaming about reaching, “American passport is the coolest thing... Ifem, you know you’ll have any kind of dress you want in America and next time we see you, you’ll be a serious Americanah” (65-100).

Adichie’s outstanding narrative skill enables the reader to smoothly realize the deceptiveness of the American dream through Ifemelu’s feeling of disappointment when she sees the real America which was far from what was displayed. Ifemelu’s high expectations worsens her feelings of dissatisfaction after she is hit by the reality of her dream country.

Nothing seems to meet her imaginary land of snowy weather and glossy buildings. Reality is totally different, Ifemeluis struck by America's hot summer, pale streets and cockroaches at home, "all her life she had thought of "overseas" as a cold place of cool coats and snow, and because America was "overseas", and her illusions so strong they could not be fended off by reason" (103).

2.1. Mimicry: Language and Hair

In addition to the physical appearance which distinguishes Black Non-Americans is their accent. During the registration at the University, Ifemeluis surprised when an American employee is talking in an unusual manner, "Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?" (133). To her astonishment, Ifemelu figures out that the woman is not having any health problem which make her talk like that but she is the reason why. Because she is an African, the woman does not know how well Ifemelu speaks English and she expects that if she speaks in a normal way, Ifemelu will not be able to understand. This pre-judgment is to be avoided by adopting an American accent and soon, "her American-accented words sailing out of her mouth" (124) simply, "because you don't want customer service people on the phone to keep asking you 'What? What?'" (140).

Ifemeluis not the only one in the novel who alters her accent as she already finds Aunt Uju drastically changes even the pronunciation of her name, "she pronounced it *you-joo* instead of *oo-joo*.... Is that how you pronounce your name now?" (104). She even prohibits Ifemelu from using the Igbo language with her son Dike because she believes that, "two languages will confuse him" (109). Upon her arrival to America, Ifemeluis does not completely grasp the changes she notices in the way her Aunt Uju speaks which gives her a new American self. Ifemelu's friend, Ginika, came years ago from Nigeria to America and she was the one who waited for Ifemelu at the airport. At her young age, it is easier for Ginika to melt into the American society and adopt to its culture and lifestyle, "Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth, the cultural cues ad seeped into her skin" (125). However, she tries not to reveal her new American identity by giving up her American accent, "Ginika had lapsed into Nigerian English, a dated, overcooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was" (123). Fortunately, Ifemeluis not the kind who judges people; instead, she accepts everyone without questioning their choices. Eventually, she finds herself bound to give up her Nigerian English and, "she began to practice an American accent" (134) until she starts receiving compliments, "Wow. Cool! You sound totally American" (175). This is one of the initial steps in Ifemelu's life toward her Americanization.

2.2. The Afro Hair: Crown of Glory

The novel pays attention to the vital role of hair in the lives of African immigrants. The Afro hair in Africa is considered as a "crown of glory" (41) while in America it became a sign of unprofessionalism. Due to the massive influence of the western superiority ideology, African immigrants do their best to make their Afro hair resembles whites' straight and silky hair. Even if this is against its nature and it might result in serious scalp problems, but African women choose to bear the pain of relaxer and harsh chemicals rather than bearing people's hurtful comments regarding their hair "dirty" (12) because of its dark color and thickness.

When Ifemelu comes to America, she does not believe to what extent this societal influence her Aunt Uju. It is not an exaggeration for her when using relaxers and unbraiding her hair just to be taken seriously in job interviews; because for Aunt Uju, if you make the choice to leave your country then you have to live up to the terms of the host country and not complain about it, "You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (119). After few years, Ifemelu surprisingly finds herself believing in the same concept for the sake of being accepted in interviews. Ifemelu has been exposed to several incidents where she is estranged because of her hair. Once she goes to a beauty salon to get her eyebrows done, they simply refuse claiming that her hair is curly, "we don't do curly" (292). The struggle with the Afro hair is a real dilemma that immigrants suffer from and they end up trying to please the American white mainstream in order not to be prevented from enjoying the least rights in that country.

2.3. Race and Other

Back in Nigeria, Ifemeluis does not think of herself as black but rather she becomes black only when she comes to America. The more years she spends in America, the more she becomes aware of the racial discrimination against blacks who, "are not supposed to be angry about racism" (221) because for white people, "race is totally overtyped these days, black people need to get over themselves" (04). Americans do not even bother themselves to differentiate between African countries as they consider it one country, not a whole continent. Ifemelu creates a Blog where she writes about the racial experiences and she advises other blacks not to try explaining where they are from because, "all of us look alike to white people" (120). She writes in her blog: "Dear non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanian, America doesn't care" (220).

Adichie highlighted the danger of the single story that Africans hold about America without neglecting the single story that Americans hold about Africans. Ifemelu is astonished by the generalization that Americans make when talking about Africa, “Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean” (15), she gets defensive and angry at those who do not respect the African diversity. For them, Africa is a place of war, poverty, hunger and diseases. Even in this contemporary era where people are supposed to be more educated and more tolerating, but the instilled white superiority is still engraved in their way of looking at blacks. Africa is still regarded as a place of exotic things and strange people who live an underprivileged and uncivilized life. They do not hesitate in degrading the capacities of blacks neglecting the fact that Nigerians for example, “are the most educated immigrant group in this country” (167). Instead, Americans arrogantly demean blacks in all possible ways even the most educated people who hold responsibility for raising awareness among racists but you find them the first to initiate racist thoughts. It is no wonder when an American professor believes that, “Black people are physically inclined and white people are intellectually inclined” (375).

Whenever Ifemelu meets rich and educated white Americans, she realizes how they treat her, “to them, she was interesting, unusual in the way she bluntly spoke her mind. They expected certain things of her, and forgave certain things from her, because she was foreign” (207). They do not miss the chance to remind her of where she comes from and how bad Africa is; as for Americans, blacks are doomed to be all what is opposite to whites. Since whites are the superior, successful, rich, educated, beautiful, civilized, then blacks shouldn't be all of that.

Dike is another character who harshly suffers from racism although he is raised there since childhood so he can be regarded as an African American but he is the only black child in a school full of whites which makes it worse. If anything bad happens at school, he is the one to be blamed because, “you have to blame the black kid first” (349). He has always been treated differently and accused of violence due to his race. The worst and the cruelest of them all is when his American teachers treat him as less of a human being and because of his skin color they believe that he does not have any feelings or does not get affected like the other white children, “She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn't give me any. She said I didn't need it” (183). Adichie made it so clear that, “Race is not biology; race is sociology” (337), people grow up in one place not having any race issues and just by moving to another place where they become a minority in a white society, race pops up and becomes a barrier which holds them back from having a stable self-perception.

In the novel, Adichie portrays how Americans cannot even bear the idea of a black woman dating a white man and they find it to be “disgusting” (194). Ifemelu is dating Curt who is a rich American and whenever he presents her, “this is my girlfriend... they looked at her with surprise. The look of people confronting a great tribal loss... she was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine with him” (292). Their reaction makes Ifemelu doubt Curt's love and not totally believe that she's worth being in such a relationship. She always feels inferior because she does not meet people's expectations and she keeps comparing herself with

Being from the place that whites consider as backward and retarded is not an easy thing to accept for Ifemelu. Therefore, she spends years struggling between her loyalty and denial of her Africanness. When comparing to other minorities living in the United States, it is very obvious that blacks are the most segregated against even if they claim that America is a multicultural society, but they hardly respect the diversity of that society. Therefore, blacks tend to deny their blackness in order to gain white American's acceptance and avoid being humiliated, “you say “I'm not black” only because you know black is at the bottom of America's race ladder. And you want none of that” (220).

2.4. The Birth of a New American self

The displacement from one country to another, the social changes, the cultural shock and the racism that Ifemelu undergoes, lead to an identity crisis where she feels alienated, lost and never at home, “this is my tenth year here and I feel as if I'm still settling” (112). The hardest period is when she arrives and struggles psychologically and financially because of not finding a job. It is not easy for her to cope with all the sudden changes and she misses being home especially at her young age and soon, the real struggle starts as she dives into depression.

She is shattered between the old and the new world, unable to find the right path for realizing her dreams without losing herself. Additionally, Ifemelu starts noticing how other immigrants are devastated and torn between home and America, how they suffer to gain a decent amount of money to give them a chance to go back to Nigeria. The journey is somehow helpful for Ifemelu as she uses it to dress up into another self without over-thinking about what others might think of her though she often receives harsh criticism, “*You have been brainwashed by the West. You should be ashamed to call yourself a Nigerian*” (italics in original 117).

As soon as she starts studying and getting engaged into the American life, “she hungered to understand everything about America, to wear a new, knowing skin right away... and she no longer read the news on Nigeria.com” (135-159).

Her name becomes Ngozi Okonkwo, which is a name of Auntie Uju’s friend. Using her social security card to get a job and pretending to be someone else since it is hard for Americans to tell the difference between blacks. After getting a job and melting into the American society, she can barely remember how it’s like to suffer from the lack of electricity. Hence, the farther she stays from all what is African, the easier her life becomes and the quicker she blends into her new American self. Despite the successful life she is living with her internship in Princeton, her blog and her white American boyfriend, but Ifemelu’s inner struggles cannot be silenced and ignored forever. She cannot live with peaceful conscience while neglecting her African self and pretending to be someone she is not.

3. Social Identity in Americanah

Individuals’ identities cannot be separated from society and this was the core of social psychology. It stressed the bond between individuals and society and how important society is in constructing one’s social identity. Therefore, to understand the changes in *Americanah*’s main character, Ifemelu, it is highly important to take into consideration the social changes that Ifemelu is exposed to. In other words, to study the effect of immigration on the social identity of Ifemelu from a social psychological point of view.

America estranged Ifemelu with its merciless racist treatment and labelling, “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (290). According to Haslam et al (2012), “Individuals strive to define themselves positively and that where sense of self derives from group membership” (204) this clarifies the tendency of immigrants to identify and categorize themselves in a certain group so that they could gain a sense of self from their in-group. Since blacks are considered to be inferior, uneducated and uncivilized in America, then black immigrants tend to avoid categorizing themselves with Africans or African Americans in America to avoid the constant low-grading, “subordinate groups often seem to internalize a wider social evaluation of themselves as “inferior” or “second class”, and this consensual inferiority is reproduced as relative self-derogation” (Tajfel & Turner 36-37).

In America, Ifemelu finds her Auntie Uju, Dike and Ginika adopting an American lifestyle, American accent and befriending white Americans. For Ginika, she comes as a young girl who is ready to absorb everything American which makes Ifemelu wonder, “whether she, too, would come to share Ginika’s taste for shapeless dresses, whether this was what America did to you” (Adichie, 2013, 126). Dike on the other hand is raised in America which deeply influences his identity as he knows nothing about Nigeria or the least he knows about it is merely negative which makes him dislike Nigeria. Dike’s mother, Auntie Uju, deprives him from learning anything about his origins and instructs Ifemelu not to talk to him in Igbo. As a result, Dike drowns into the American mainstream, hanging out with only white Americans and when he talks with them, “he took on a swagger in his voice and in his gait... and sprinkled his speech with “ain’t” and “y’all”” (332).

Before categorizing herself with a white American in-group, Ifemelu initiates the necessary changes that she needs in order to be accepted in the American white world starting from changing her Nigerian accent. The social categorization is very important for individuals to draw a path for their self-reference as it was clarified by Tajfel & Turner as, “cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment” (40). Therefore, Ifemelu needs to understand herself in relation to the new American social context and because she understands the demeaning placement of black race, she urges herself to avoid being categorized in a black in-group, “as she read, America’s mythologies began to take on meaning, America’s tribalism—race, ideology and religion—became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge” (136).

The other immigrants implicitly encourage Ifemelu to melt into the American society. Whether consciously or unconsciously, she continuously witnesses and hears hints from the black immigrants she reveals how they avoid their kids from having any relationship with blacks. This is an incentive for Ifemelu to confirm her choice of not blending with blacks in America. These layers of knowledge contribute for elevating Ifemelu’s self-perception and raising her self-confidence to believe that she can really become an American.

Dating a white American makes it even easier for Ifemelu to categorize herself into a white in-group after working for Kimberly as a nanny. Ifemelu’s education enables her to identify herself with Kimberly’s family and entourage regardless of the racial differences and the teasing she receives from other whites. In Kimberly’s family, Ifemelu is complimented to be a ‘privilege’, “I’ve never been called privilege in my life! ... It feels good” (168).

It enhances the way she perceives herself because she yearns for the mere recognition of her presence, “I got a letter today... with her name correctly spelled and elegantly italicized had aroused her spirits, made her little less invisible, a little more present. Somebody knew her” (132). The pursuit of visibility becomes her core target as she identifies herself with a white American in-group.

For a black immigrant like Ifemelu, winning the heart of a rich white man is beyond her dreams especially that Curt himself has never dated a black girl. Moreover, he is the one who could facilitate her Green card process because, “Curt could, with a few calls, rearrange the world, have things slide into spaces that he wanted them to” (202). Life is easier for wealthy white Americans unlike those poor, bad destined black immigrants who suffer from the rejection and ignorance of the immigration department in order to get a green card.

Ifemeluis living the life of her dreams with Curt, traveling and attending meetings with his friends who resemble him. And since she completely identifies herself with them as her in-group, “she felt proud to be with him” (219), she ignores other people from her race, her black sisters and brothers. One day, she meets her old Nigerian friend Kayode and, “she was supposed to exchange phone numbers, talk for longer, behave in all the expected ways” (223). However, she surprisingly refuses to have any contact with him as she quickly dismisses herself. This cold reaction toward a Nigerian old friend, is a spontaneous behavior since she now considers him to be an out-group member.

Her parents in Nigeria completely support her Americanization process because they regard it as a privilege and an honor that their daughter became an American. Her father is hypnotized by the concept of the American dream where all people are treated equally because for him, “America is an organized place, and job opportunities are rife there” (201) and Ifemeludoes not deny or disagree. Instead, she confirms the American dream mythology to avoid any further questioning and explanation.

3.1.Negative Social Identity

Adichie opted for portraying the alterations that immigrants go through and the new American identity that they adopt through several shifts starting from the American accent to the in-group they belong to. Ifemeluthinks of her new American self as she categorizes herself with a white American in-group, “it was with Curt that she had first looked into the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else” (191), but she suddenly realizes how unstable and disoriented she is. Although she is categorized with the dominating social in-group which is supposed to empower her to reach a positive identity, but she is struggling to have a concrete self-definition, “there was something wrong with her... A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself” (287). This instability is explained by Tajfel and Turner as negative social identity.

There were several accumulated incidents which pushesIfemelu to reconsider and rethink about her in-group and whether she really belongs there, “for weeks, Ifemelustumbled around, trying to remember the person she was before Curt... she was blinded by the brightness of Curt” (299). Neither black nor white people swallow Ifemelu’s relationship with Curt and she constantly receives negative comments whenever they see them together, “a black man walked past and muttered, “you ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that? ... she was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine with him” (212-292). All those negative observations and racial discrimination contribute to make Ifemelu seriously rethink her relationship with Curt and whether she really wants to live all her life with a white American partner. Despite Curt’s acceptance and understanding but Ifemelu admits that she can never be completely honest with him about racial issues that matter but she likes not to share them with him.The most effecting event which re-assures her instability was thanking a telemarketer who compliments her accent, “you sound totally American” (175). Ifemelu bitterly feels an uneasiness after the phone call.

3.2.Individual Mobility

According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals with a negative social identity opt for one of the three coping mechanisms:Individual Mobility, Social Creativity, or Social Competition. In *Americanah*, the main character goes for the Individual Mobility which means an individual’s movement from one group to another in order to achieve a positive social identity. This mobility is often driven by a personal dissatisfaction without taking into consideration the group interest. The criteria through which Ifemelurelies on to choose her in-group after immigration is blurred by the glamour of America and the fear to be estranged and degraded. Therefore, Ifemelurealizes that her fake American self is not reflecting her true self and she is not happy in her own skin. Consequently, she decides to individually move out from her white in-group and re-join a black in-group where she can finally restore her sense of being. This decision is driven by numerous events which make Ifemelu careless about the status of the black in-group whether it is low or high as long as she is satisfied.

The flexibility of the social categorizations and identifications within a group facilitates the movement from one group to another. Ifemelu's decision is initiated by her returning back to her Nigerian English accent and giving up on the fake American accent. The fact that she attends meetings in the African Students Association helps her to be in touch with other black immigrants where, "Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself" (Adichie, 2013, 139).

Meeting Blaine, the assistant Professor at Yale, is a huge step toward confirming her re-categorization in a black in-group. Ifemelu loves that he considers himself as black though he is an African American, "his use of "they" suggested an "us"" (177). Blaine has a strong sense of loyalty toward blacks in America especially when he dedicates himself to voluntarily tutoring black immigrant kids and standing up for the rights of maltreated and oppressed blacks.

4. Black Self Love Through the Nigrescence

4.1. Pre-encounter

The novel of *Americanah* can be analyzed through the Nigrescence lens where we divide Ifemelu's journey of immigration into Cross' stages of becoming black. Starting from the first stage of the pre-encounter where the individual is mesmerized by the Eurocentric values and holds "little salience to race out of denial, self-hatred" (Cross, 1994, 122). Ifemelu is absorbed by the Western principles since she is in Nigeria and dreaming about migrating to America. Since their childhood, Ifemelu and her friends, or Africans in general, are fed with the White Supremacy concept which values all what is white and degrades all what is black. Hence, it is a common thing that Africans, "have frequently been socialized to favor a Eurocentric cultural perspective" (Cross, 1991, 193). For this reason, African immigrants tend to seek assimilation in the American society which strengthens their pro-white/anti-black feelings because, "in becoming a good American, he has also become anti-Black and anti-African" (Cross, 1991, 16).

The novel clearly depicts Ifemelu and other immigrants' quick assimilation and the fast development of the pro-white feelings since they are previously prepared to immerse themselves into the American society, "the pre-encounter person's historical perspective distorts Black history. It is believed that Black people came from a strange, uncivilized, "dark" continent" (Cross, 1971, 16). Owing to the misrepresentation of Africa, immigrants' children in America grow up with little to no knowledge about their home country or knowing only its negative image as portrayed by the Westerners. This was reflected by Adichie in her novel through the character of Dike who clarified: "I don't like Nigeria" (Adichie, 2013, 113) because what he hears about Nigeria is merely from a negative perspective.

Concerning the pre-encounter phase in Ifemelu's life, it all starts with her adaptation of the American accent and her eagerness to know more about America. She tries to straighten her hair with relaxers because the Afro hair in America does not go hand in hand with professionalism; Ifemelu suffers to accept herself with her natural hair. In the pre-encounter, individuals might hold anti-Black feelings and it is noticeable when Ifemelu disagrees with Kimberly about the beauty of a black woman, "No, she isn't... You know you can just say 'black'. Not every black person is beautiful" (147).

We can say that Ifemelu and other black immigrants, "*went to America and got lost*" (116) as they are impatient to win the Americans' acceptance and recognition. People in the pre-encounter have a tendency to glorify America and devalue their home country. Moreover, blacks escape any potential relationships with other blacks due to the belief that their community will not bring with it any "actual sources of personal support" (Cross, 1991, 191).

4.2. Encounter

During their presence in America, immigrants or blacks in general might be subjected to, "some experience that manage to slip by or even shatters the person's current feeling about himself and his interpretation of the condition of Blacks in America" (Cross 17). Adichie uses several events or incidents which make Ifemelu re-thinks and re-evaluates her perception of the black race and her American self. Her decision to switch back to her Nigerian English is caused by, "that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her" (Adichie, 2013, 07). Various circumstances shape her beliefs and attitudes and one of them is a phone call from a telemarketer who spontaneously complements her American accent when he figures out that she is an immigrant, "her decision was prompted by a telemarketer's call... Wow. Cool! You sound totally American" (175). Ifemelu felt guilty for thanking the telemarketer and,

"She begin to feel the stain of burgeoning shame spreading all over her... Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? ... She had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her feeling victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers." (175)

This is rather a wake-up call for Ifemelu to finally open up her eyes and reconsiders her racial value. Therefore, the feeling of guilt can take over the individual at this stage.

On the other hand, the racial discrimination that she goes through during her relationship with Curt is an incentive for her to rethink her place in the white Americans' world. A comment from a black man, "you ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that" (212) makes her not only furious but feeling embarrassed as well. Ifemelustarts to carefully notice all the signs around her hoping to find a solace and comfort with her own self. Even the mere representation of women in magazines grasps her attention as, "she spread the magazines on the table... Look, all of them are white women... So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines" (295).

All these encountered events but Ifemelu still does not entirely stand up for blacks and she is harshly blamed by Blaine who, unlike Ifemelu, enjoys helping blacks and supporting them so, "she recognized in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness" (345). It is not until the last event where she finally realizes how distant she is from her acclaimed American identity and how far she can go in staying in America,

"Blaine's friends and I were talking about kids and 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 a child who feeds on praise and expects a star for efforts and talks back to adults in the name of self-expression." (458)

According to Cross (1978), in the encounter stage, "the person is not Black yet, but he/she has made the decision to become Black" (17). Therefore, Ifemelureaches the state where she is ready to re-explore the black history.

4.3. Immersion/Emersion

The enthusiasm from the encounter stage leads to the birth of a pro-Black feelings as it is described by Cross, "the first half of the third stage is immersion into Blackness; the second is emergence from the dead-end, either/or racist, oversimplified aspects of the immersion experience" (207). In the immersion/emersion stage, individuals begin their journey of discovering and appreciating the African legacy. Ifemelu, "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" (Adichie, 2013, 213). This acceptance of Afro hair is a huge improvement toward, "an immersion into Blackness and a liberation from Whiteness" (Cross, 1971, 203). During the presidential electoral campaign:

"Ifemelu liked to watch Clinton on Television... She wished her victory... Until the morning she picked up Barack Obama's book. Dreams for my Father... If only the man who wrote this book could be the president of America... She wilted as she read the posts about Obama... and stand by the window to hide her tears even from herself... Send him back to the African Jungle. A black man will never be in the white house." (Adichie, 2013, 353)

This shift would not occur without Ifemelu's willingness and openness to read more about blacks in America and how proud she is that the potential American president can be a black man. In this stage, Ifemelu moves from an individualistic to a communist perspective where she joins the African Students Association, "here, Ifemlelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here she does not have to explain herself" (139) and she engages into aiding blacks. The importance of the black community solidarity is further highlighted by Adichie when Ifemeluexplains the "nodding sign" shared by blacks, "you must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for black people to say, "you are not alone, I am here too" (220).

During the meetings at the African Students Association, Africans: "mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was mockery born of longing, and of heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again" (139). It is commonly believed that at this stage, individuals become creative and the focus of their creativity lies on Africa, "the African Americans who come to our meetings are the ones who write poems about Mother Africa and think every African is a Nubian queen" (140). Ifemelu herself becomes a successful blogger with her racial blog entitled Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black. Moreover, she begins delivering diversity talks at schools and universities.

Through her blog, she can address other blacks in America and discuss with them the racial issues that they usually do not share with white Americans or they simply ignore their existence. It is a space for her to hear other stories of people who suffered, "she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear stories of others. How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America?" (296). Blacks start to defend all what is African and make sure that no one messes up with their heritage, "Can we ban Afro wigs at Halloween? Afro is not costume (297).

Ifemelu uses the wide spread of her blog and the voice she has, “to convince other women about the merits of wearing their hair natural” (12) as she herself realizes that nothing would be better for her than the Afro hair, “I like my hair the way God made it” (12).

4.4. Internalization

At the end of the immersion/emersion stage, the struggle between the old and the identity is over and the internalization stage begins as individuals reach the state of inner peace with their black identity. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu goes beyond retrieving her black identity but she decides to go back home. This decision is stimulated by the accumulated incidents that she faces since she came to America until she finally, “returned her voice to herself” (180). Her returning to Lagos is a tough and a courageous decision that even her parents question its rationality, “Will you be able to cope?” (17), and they “seemed to think that she might not be able to “cope” with “Nigeria”. At least you are now an American citizen, so you can always return to America” (17).

Individuals might develop anti-white feelings as Ifemelu when she starts devaluating whites and stating their crimes against blacks, “many America Blacks have a white person in their ancestry, because white slave owners liked to go a-raping in the slave quarters at night” (337). In Nigeria, she is excited to start over and in order not to be considered as an Americanah, she starts, “putting America down, talking only about the things she, too, disliked about America, exaggerating her non-American accent” (398). At first, her friends accuse her of being an Americanah if she criticizes anything in Lagos. However, they admit that she is, “no longer behaving like an Americanah! And despite herself, Ifemelu felt pleased to her this” (395). One of the most vital lessons that Ifemelu learns is the deception of the American dream “the best thing about America is that it gives you space... I like that you buy into the dream, it’s a lie but you buy into it and that’s all that matters” (434). These drastic changes in Ifemelu’s identity empower her to build a strong self-confidence and satisfaction as clarified by Cross that individuals, “achieve a feeling of inner security and are more satisfied with themselves” (21).

This satisfaction is the fruit of Ifemelu’s internal stability and the end of the battling selves. When she reaches Nigeria, she stops being black, “I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black” (Adichie 477). There is no doubt that her return is a risky move toward the unknown but Ifemelu can, after years of displacement and alienation, feel that she is finally home, “I’m really home. I’m home” (411). The scary feeling she has, “of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar” (385), is not a barrier for her to enjoy every aspect in Lagos with all its differences from America.

5. Conclusion

Some of the African authors use their literary works as a weapon to dismantle and break the Western stereotypes and the exaggerated vision of America for the African population. They attempt to expose what Chimamanda Adichie called “the danger of a single story” from both sides, Americans and Africans. They mirror the flexibility of identity and the ability of immigrants to re-invent and re-construct their identities according to the new economic, linguistic, racial, social and cultural factors in the host country. In the selected literary work, the American dream is projected, consumed and distorted through the experiences of the migrated characters which mirror the deception of the Africans’ expectations after living in the U.S. The revealed superficiality truth about the American dream is a way that Adichie opted for in order to highlight a very neglected and a fantasized image about the West which does not necessarily exist in reality. From the other side, *Americanah* reflects on how Africa is perceived through the eyes of Americans as a single place, a source of poverty and sickness, and how these limited perceptions affect the immigrants. To conclude, the incorporation of social psychological theories gave an in depth exploration of the contemporary implication of immigration on Africans. The fact that individuals cannot separate themselves from society explains their spontaneous social identification and categorization within a single or multiple social groups. Most importantly, this article highlighted the influence of immigration on the African immigrants’ sense of home and their appreciation of their black identity as depicted in *Americanah*.

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