

“Countering Cultural Deracination: An Analytical Reading of Adichie's *Americanah*”^(*)

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Abstract

This study investigates Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) in the light of the various theoretical speculations on cultural deracination that dominates the reality of African immigrants in transnational spaces. Within such spaces the multicultural dimensions of their African identity is reduced to a one-dimensional entity marked exclusively by the colour of their skin. It is my contention that Adichie captures a broad spectrum of myriad experiences and voices in an endeavour to reflect on the problematics involved in the immigrants' encounter with Western culture. On the one hand, vulnerable individuals fail in the combat to maintain their ancestral identities and succumb to deracination, invisibility and negation. On the other hand, resistant and insuperable African immigrants affirm their commitment to their moorings and thus they emerge triumphant. In this manner, they reconfigure their African identity and endure the encounter with the threats of deracination, cultural trajectories and ideological options that tend to suppress their cultural heritage and sense of belonging. Adichie's thorough scrutiny of the African American cultural 'double consciousness,' 'single story' deconstruction, utilization of identity signifiers such as language, hair and lifestyles, and the manipulation of blogging device encapsulate the compelling weapons to challenge Western deracination.

Keywords

deracination, resistance, identity, immigrants, African Americans, hair, language, blogs, single story

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليل رواية أمريكانا (٢٠١٣) للروائية شيماماندا نجوزي أديشي في ضوء نظريات "اجتثاث الجذور" التي هيمنت على واقع المهاجرين الأفارقة في العوالم الغربية. وفي هذه العوالم تقلصت الشخصية والهوية الأفريقية ذات الأبعاد المتعددة إلى شخصية أحادية المنظور تحدد ملامحها سمة غالبية واحدة، وهي لون البشرة. وقد استخدمت أديشي في روايتها مجموعة متنوعة من الشتات والأصوات في محاولة حثيثة لإظهار الإشكالات التي تواجه المهاجرين في صدامهم مع الثقافة الغربية. فمن ناحية لم يستطع بعض المهاجرين مقاومة الاندماج والاستيعاب أو التماثل الثقافي (علي الرغم من عدم الاعتراف بهم أو قبولهم كمواطنين أمريكيين) ولذلك تم اجتثاث جذورهم وثقافتهم الأفريقية. ومن ناحية أخرى نجح البعض الآخر في اجتياز هذا الصدام منتصرًا. حيث تمكنوا من التغلب علي كل ما يهدد ثقافتهم وهويتهم وجذورهم وانتماءهم. ومن خلاصة تمحيصها الدقيق لواقع المهاجرين في الغرب؛ استخدمت أديشي العديد من الأدوات التي استخدمها هؤلاء المهاجرون في مقاومة عملية اجتثاث الجذور، ومن بين تلك الأدوات: تنفيذ مفهوم القصة الواحدة، دلالات الهوية مثل: اللغة والشعر وأنماط الحياة، المدونات.

الكلمات الدالة

اجتثاث الجذور، مقاومة، هوية، مهاجرين، الأفريقيون الأمريكيان، شعر، لغة، مدونات، القصة الواحدة.

[T]he Negro is not born per se but *reborn* out of the detritus of American racialism. It is not so much a matter of deracination as *re-racination*, the production of the Negro as a marker of the universal and the cosmopolitan such that even the 'whitest' individual (the mulatto) might proudly proclaim, 'I am a Negro American.'"

(Reid-Pharr 52)

Introduction

In every respect, deracination denotes "to pluck or tear up by the roots; to eradicate or exterminate" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 68). The stem of the word thereby has no forthright relation to 'race'; however, "its emphasis in both English and French has shifted to 'uprooted from one's national or social environment' (as in the French *déraciné*)" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 78). In *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon finds it entirely puzzling that the "non-white" is persistent in seeking to absorb the features of the white man through an appropriation of Western manners of speech, behaviour and attitudes. This stratagem entails deracination not only from

identity, but also from colour and language. In this sense, the black man seems to be a consumer of the Western culture rather than a producer of his own. The main reason that lurks beneath such a stratagem is the black man's compelling need to be recognized as a subject in an attempt to move away from the periphery as the mimic 'other.' Fanon puts it most precisely; the black man seeks to "turn White or disappear" (xxxiii).

In his conjectures on mimicry and deracination, Pramod K. Nayar points out that the Indian novelist Attia Hosain uses deracination to describe the "slow voluntary 'erosion' of racial characteristics that erases the identity of the native, both in terms of an individual as well as in terms of a culture" (32). Morley and Petras further clarify that deracination "involves the displacement and destruction of one's sense of self" (55) as it disowns the totality of one's existence and ancestry and obliterates family ties, community and history. Furthermore, Homi Bhabha coins the concept of the 'unhomely' (445) to underprop the state of the alien settlers being at crossroads in an interstitial space between two or more cultures. This position creates feelings of estrangement, homelessness, psychological split as well as the loss of identity and historical specificities. The basic response to such conditions in Andrew Gurr's view is maintained in "a search for identity, the quest for a home, through self-discovery or self-realization" (14). Reiland Rabaka presumes that when Jean-Paul Sartre writes of "nudity," he unequivocally unveils that part of the Negritude project "involves deracination, or stripping or suspending ... blacks of their current conception(s) of themselves and their life-worlds, which has more often than not been diabolically bequeathed to them by the white supremacist world" (121). The complete nudity of the Blacks signifies an emphasis on an entire decolonization and deconstruction of the Eurocentric white conceptions in order to construct their own 'Truth.' Based on that postulation, in an interview with Rene Depestre, Aime Césaire assumes that African writers must challenge deracination by "a violent affirmation" of their distinct historicity, "*nègre*, and *negritude*" (89). Accordingly, Césaire advocates reconfiguring a new identity for the Africans to pull apart the negative Eurocentric paradigms that they have come to accept. Additionally, the history and heritage of the black man must be rediscovered through black eyes and reinterpreted to the world as worthy of respect. Reinterpretations as such can "make an important contribution to the world"

(Césaire 91-92) in view of the valuable and great cultural elements they encompass.

Among the African American narratives that undertake to explore the diasporic discomfiting realities of deracination, identity, nostalgia and belonging are Ama Atta Aido's *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint* (1977), Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* (1981), Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I do not Come to You by Chance* (2010), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2014), and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016). These narratives draw attention to the fact that migration and race are inextricably linked. They also examine "how migration shapes racial identity" and "how racial formations like blackness refuse to travel and translate even as they are globally mobile" (Goyal 11). Nevertheless, Adichie's *Americanah* has its own specificity among the canon of immigrant literature since it goes beyond race to examine the immigrants' struggle against deracination as well as their strife and quest for heritage and 're-racination.'

This study undertakes to examine Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) in the light of the theoretical speculations on cultural prism that haunt the African immigrants in transnational spaces. It also highlights how they reconceive their African identity and face the threats of deracination, cultural trajectories and ideological options which tend to undermine their sense of belonging. The narrative captures a broad spectrum of myriad experiences in America and the United Kingdom in an attempt to reflect on the transformative nature of the immigrants in these countries. Adichie's thorough scrutiny of cultural prism, 'single story' deconstruction, utilization of identity signifiers such as language, hair and lifestyles, and the manipulation of blogging device encapsulate the compelling weapons to challenge Western deracination.

a. Dual Identities and/ or Cultural Prism

Split personality is one of the common leitmotifs in the African and African Western narratives wherein the expatriate deracinated immigrants undergo an existential crisis of consciousness caught between two opposed codes of meaning: "the African and Western episteme" (Adesanmi 145). W. E. B. DuBois theorizes on this dialectic describing it as "double con-

sciousness” which results in the peculiar sensation of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (8). Subconsciously, the African immigrants are compelled to look at themselves through the lens of the white oppressors creating a dilemma manifested in their black skin.

In this context, Fanon defines deracination as a “self-division” (17); namely, African immigrants are involved in a dialectical struggle between deracination and integration in the Western milieu. In other words, they would either surrender to absorption into the Euro-American mainstream or combat it and thus they maintain the allegiance to their African heritage and original culture. Correspondingly, the black woman and/or man seem “permanently entrapped in the site of deracination and is therefore locked up in an unending struggle against alienation” (Adesanmi 145). In Pius Adesanmi’s view, the archetypal trajectory to resolve such an ordeal is maintained in the alienated migrant subject’s inscription of “resistant notions of ontology that are informed by his or her multilayered, multi-accented experiences” (145).

Significantly, the title ‘Americanah’ foreshadows that “The black Americans inhabit two worlds of difference and two layers of self-awareness and a divided self” (Sackeyfio 225) oscillating between America, Europe and Africa. In an interview with David Bianculli, Adichie expounds that the title ‘Americanah’ denotes a Nigerian word for those who “have been to the U.S. and return with American affectations.” Hence, “It’s often used,” she says, “in the context of a kind of gentle mockery.” In his deliberations on the dual allusions of the title, Richard Jones focuses on “nah” at the end of the word ‘Americanah’. He argues that the African American philosophers have proposed the term, “Africana” (without “h”) (225) to include African philosophy under an international rubric. He further explains that the term has been coined by Lucius T. Outlaw Jr. who sees “Africana Philosophy as the collected practices-discursive and non-discursive-of black folks scattered in the diaspora.” Jones proceeds, “Adichie’s re-appropriation reverses the direction from African-American to American-African, for Nigerians living in the US; hence, Africanah takes on an inverted dialectical usage and meaning” (225).

In her penetrating observation on the title, Serena Guarracino contends that the title bears “a mock epithet for been-tos.” This is obvious in the

opening of the narrative when Ginika, a high-school friend of Ifemelu, the protagonist, “is leaving for the US and is distributing her clothes to her friends” (“Writing” 12). Her friend, Ranyinudo reacts, “She’ll come back and be a serious *Americanah* like Bisi” (65). Subsequently, they all laugh at the word “*Americanah*,” with “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” (65). The word recurs when Ifemelu herself gives away her clothes before her immigration to the USA. Ranyinudo tells her “you know you’ll have any kind of dress you want in America and next time we see you, you will be a serious *Americanah*” (101). Division of clothing thereby operates as a signifier of self-representation, Black identity and ritual codes.

The word ‘*Americanah*’ also connotes a style of clothing pinpointing the African immigrants’ choices of clothes that always cope with the up-to date American fashion trends. Imani Perry posits that “it is quite rare for African Americans to wear African clothing” (134). Adichie indicts the American self-fulfilled culture that disregards the courteous implication of dressing and clothing. This is apparent in one of Adichie’s provocative quotes that unveils the narcissistic Americans who propagate, “*We are too superior/busy/cool/not uptight to bother about how we look to other people, and so we can wear pajamas to school and underwear to the mall*” (130). Here Adichie conceptualizes a new perspective about the dire need for a genuine egalitarianism that may terminate American aversive racism.

To resolve the dilemma of the divided identity that troubles the Africans in transnational spaces, Adichie utilizes multiple diaspora voices entangled in variant social, political and geographical trajectories. Among these voices are Ifemelu, her Aunty Uju and her son Dike, and Ginika in the United States, and Obinze, his cousin Nicholas and his wife Ojiugo in the United Kingdom. Betiel Wasihun observes that the moving between different settings “calls for immediate comparisons between common images of Africa (or the African) in the Western world and the migrating African’s perspectives” (395). Comparisons as such reflect the predicament that the Africans undergo in Western communities; their constant shift between opposing lives. Commenting on ‘double consciousness’ from a

psychological point of view, Cross, Parham and Helms remark that “the social history of African Americans has been dominated by two compelling processes: deracination, or the attempt to erase Black consciousness, and nigrescence, or the struggle for Black self-awareness” (4).

The narrative foregrounds the love story between Ifemelu and Obinze in Nigeria in the middle of the 1990s. Yet, it is subtly framed by and unfolds against a backdrop of deracination, immigrant assimilation, racial inequality, loss of identity, belonging and nostalgia. Adichie thereby embarks on a political dissection of race and identity crises that the narrative unravels through Ifemelu’s diverse romances with not only Obinze, the Nigerian black man, but also with Blaine the African American university professor as well as the prosperous American Curt.

In all respects, Ifemelu and Obinze are forlorn and afflicted under the military law. Mired in dissatisfaction and discomfiture, they cogitate about escaping “from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness” (277). More precisely, they determine to take different paths in order to alternate their fortunes. Hence, they are not propelled by “fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls ... so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty” (277). Additionally, they are not infatuated with the American Dream since they are “raised well fed and watered” (58). Nevertheless, they both believe in the Western myths of multiethnic “perfect democracy and unfettered possibility ... with the aesthetics of racial equality or “color blindness” (Perry 128). With an opportunity of obtaining a scholarship in Philadelphia, Ifemelu immigrates from Nigeria to the United States convinced that Obinze will join her. Even though Obinze is fascinated by the American culture, he is not able to immigrate to America. Besides, he manages to get to the United Kingdom; however, his immigration becomes a nightmarish and humiliating odyssey. In contrast, Ifemelu graduates successfully in the United States and launches an internet blog.

It is through the outsider perspectives of Ifemelu and Obinze that Adichie highlights adeptly the African orientation toward the West interweaving the different directions in which the mindset of the Africans move with the American and British politics and ways of life. The central dilemma confronted in both arenas is deracination: African immigrants are forced to

struggle to maintain their commitment to their roots and values or assimilate into the aura of American life abiding by its 'privileged' social norms. On the one hand, Ifemelu opts for connecting with her Nigerian origins. On the other hand, Auntie Uju, her son Dike, Ginika, Nicholas and Ojiugo are all deracinated. Perry ironically demonstrates that "despite the collective memory of slavery, the legacies of Jim Crow, and persistent racial inequality, generations of willing Black immigrants have followed the unwilling over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first" (128). It is thereby sardonic that "for African Americans, the country of oppression and the country of liberation are the same country" (Hertzberg and Gates).

Arriving at Auntie Uju's home, Ifemelu reflects on the hybrid identities which catch her attention. To her, the cultural associations of names generate profound implications. The noticeable eccentric psychological changes of Auntie Uju shock Ifemelu and shatter the sense of familiarity that she expects to find when she stays as one of the relatives. Auntie Uju has Americanized her name from "oo-joo" (105) to Uju to match up the American sensibilities and demands for names. Similarly, Ifemelu has to use the name of someone else to find illegal work; otherwise, she will actually starve to death. She, in turn, loses the sense identity which is couched in her real name. The erasure of identity is accentuated with Ginika's admonition of Ifemelu. She remarks, "You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name" (132). Such reprimand underscores the crisis of cultural identity and the gullible nature of the Americans who "believe all kinds of shit about Africa" (132).

Ifemelu observes that no matter how much Auntie Uju tries to be recognized as an American subject, she is deemed by others on the grounds of her colour rather than her aptitudes. After passing an exam for medical license, Auntie Uju tells Ifemelu "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" (120). The narrator points up the submissive mindset of Auntie Uju as a member of the ASA (African Students Association) that mimics "what Americans [tell] them" (140). This approach divulges the immigrants' naivety and insecurity vis a vis their vulnerable subsistence in

Western milieus. Evidently, the efforts exerted by the immigrants such as Auntie Uju to be recognized as integral to the American society and blend in have disconnected them from their national identity. Drawing on the same point, Bernard D. Lombardi writes, “The acculturation experiences of West Indians and new-wave Africans have proven more difficult than those of non-black immigrants because of American social perceptions and understandings of blackness” (2).

The narrative opens at a time before Ifemelu is mindful of such problematic racial issues because a considerable portion is presented through flashbacks that disrupt the linearity of the narration shifting back and forth and transporting the reader from the present to the past. The narrator recounts that the attendance of Ifemelu at the university in the USA demarcates a new conceptualization of the American racial complications. She perceives that all Africans, like West Indians, are classified as one group based merely on the physical features or phenotypical similarities. Ramon Saldivar argues that it can “no longer be considered exclusively in the binary form of black and white, which has traditionally structured racial discourse in the United States” (Saldivar 520). Still, Ifemelu is shocked and stunned by the peripheral position and stereotypical image assigned to her by her roommate as well as many other Americans.

In England, Obinze is subjected to a similar cultural shock. Being the only son of a sophisticated university professor in Nigeria, Obinze is “well raised, well fed and watered” (258). Yet, he hopes “to find a resonance, a shaping of his longings, a sense of the America that he had imagined himself a part of” (258). It is drawn to the attention of the reader by the narrator that Obinze, from a young age, constantly longs for living in America and considers it the ultimate compliment to be labeled a ‘black American.’ He further underscores his persistent desire “to know about day-to-day life in America ... what consume[s] [people], what sham[es] them and what attract[s] them” (258). He has grown up watching American films and reading American narratives of Graham Greene, Mark Twain and James Baldwin. However, he finds, “nothing grave, nothing serious, nothing urgent, and most dissolved into ironic nothingness” (258). Therefore, he gets disillusioned after reading them.

Despite Obinze’s profound infatuation with America, he is incapable of obtaining a visa to enter it due to the worldwide political upheavals and

security controls following 11 September. Instead, he has to immigrate to England with a temporary visa for six months. In England, he finds himself, like Ifemelu, entangled in the same stereotypical codes of the 'single story.' Such predicament has instigated feelings of failure, dehumanization and marginalization. As a result, he avoids contacting his mother and cannot hold the National Insurance or NI number to work legally. Additionally, he feels so insecure and terrified seeing a policeman or anyone in a uniform. In other words, he fights the urge to run "with the faintest scent of authority" (259) as pointed out by the narrator. Figuratively, Obinze's state of apprehensive existence is depicted by the narrator as invisible as an "erased pencil sketch" (259).

The phobia of Obinze is intensified by a series of newspaper articles and stories propagating the fear in the British Isles regarding the danger coming from asylum seekers whose children have flooded schools. Obinze's concern is aggravated by the attempt of the politicians to take strong actions against them. The narrator emphasizes the falsity of such a claim. He indicates that "the influx into Britain of black and brown people ... [has been] created by Britain" (260-261). Challenging such "influx" in fact undermines the normal course of history.

In London, Obinze, like Ifemelu, undergoes a duality of consciousness and observes, with a great alarm, the distorted and odd behaviour of the Nigerians. A case in point is Emenike, Nicholas's former Nigerian classmate, who invites Obinze to a lunch party. The eccentricity of Emenike is that the food is self-consciously served in Indian plates. Obinze muses whether Emenike believes that the beauty of the plates is maintained in being "handmade by poor people in a foreign country or whether he had simply learned to pretend so" (273). In both cases, Emenike comes close to the white self and detaches from his African identity. Obinze is also astounded to see a Ghanaian woman who works in the same company ignoring him and preferring friendship with white cleaners. In Obinze's view, Nicholas also typifies a revealing example of the duality of consciousness since he has lost all memories of his African berths.

In fact, Nicholas's relationship with Obinze in UK mirrors that of Auntie Uju with Ifemelu in USA. Both Nicholas and Auntie Uju are infatuated with Western citizenship and they encourage other Africans in their community

to assimilate into the mainstream. In England, Nicholas urges Obinze to obtain a National Insurance number that would facilitate getting a job, if he does not have a work visa. He proceeds, "Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin" (241). Obviously, Nicholas is a man of words not actions; his assistance of other people is limited to mere verbal pieces of advice. Even Emenike and his relatives, whom Obinze thinks would show him the way, have all forsaken him. When Obinze tells them about his dire need for the NI number, "They all shook their heads vaguely" (149) as stated by the narrator. For Obinze, Africans in the diaspora, particularly Nicholas, have been remarkably changed. He attributes the transition that Nicholas has undergone to his responsibilities as "husband and father, homeowner in England" (241) as well as Nicholas's fears of being expelled from his work due to the fraud he is committing by using other people's names.

As a consequence of his disarrayed reality in UK, Obinze invented a new identity that seems to be in conflict with his African one. His situation changes from an African aristocrat to another that is totally different; he has to stoop and accepts menial jobs such as a janitor cleaning toilets. He also falls into the abyss of counterfeiting documents in an attempt to obtain a European passport through arranging a fake visa marriage.

Obviously, the lived experience of migration in variant trajectories epitomizes a watershed in the life of both Ifemelu and Obinze. Before migration, they are unconscious of the diametrically opposing nature of Africa in comparison to the global North. They are merely enamored by it as "an idealized place constructed, in the imagination, from films, television shows, and through a romanticizing gaze that glosses over the difficulties that American literature—always beautiful in their eyes—depicts" (Ochiel). However, after immigration they grasp the threatening deracination that jeopardizes their own identity, heritage and roots. Scrutinizing the state of recent immigrants, Orem Ochiel argues that the Africans in the diaspora are "unmoored from history." They reckon that the North will provide them with the opportunity to luxuriate in an ideal and prosperous life, even though they might lose their African identity. In this sense, Ochiel infers that Africans in the diaspora are neither as connected nor identified with America as the American Blacks. In addition, they are not particularly "conscious of the long shadow of slave trade across the Atlantic nor do they

retain a knowledge of the collective struggles of immigrants and minorities in Europe” (Ochiel). Consequently, they seem uprooted from their African roots.

Adichie digs deeper to unfold more about the peevisish aspects that characterize the relations between African Americans and Africans or so called American Africans. An instance is manifested in the speech of Wambui, a Kenyan woman activist and the president of the African Students Association, to the new members of the ASA. In that speech, Wambui differentiates between the ASA and Black Student Association. She states “We call people like Kofi American African, not African American, which is what we call our brothers and sisters whose ancestors were slaves” (141). Hence, at the core of the narrative lie the conflicting racial encounters between African-Americans and African-Africans, or Non-American Blacks, resonating all the diverse colonial histories of Nigerians and Afro-Americans as well as sundry standpoints on race. Another example is discernible in the conversation of Jane, Auntie Uju’s neighbour, with Ifemelu about her inclination to transfer her children to a school other than that of black Americans. She demonstrates, “Marlon says we’ll move to the suburbs soon so they can go to better schools. Otherwise, she will start behaving like these black Americans” (113).

The problematics of race relations is also perceptible in the contradictory attitude of the sister of Ifemelu’s employer; she commends a Ugandan classmate although she avoids socializing with African American women. In a sardonic response, Ifemelu writes, “Maybe when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford” (170). Moreover, she presents Ifemelu’s ethnic quandary as different: in America, she is not only black but also a Non-American black. That is to say, she is neither able to act as an African subject committed to her moorings nor become entirely absorbed in the American community.

Although both categories of American African and African American are regarded as ‘others,’ the African American seems desirable and coveted, whereas the American Africans or Black Africans are depicted as unwanted or undesirable. With this observation, Adichie indicates that no barriers can hinder her from dissecting the racial issues even those relevant to people

who share the same phenotypic features. In the light of this reading, Jasbir Puar reflects on the intricacy of the mechanism of such a construction that “not only involves a lot of different axes (gender, race, class, nationality et cetera), but also that within these axes there isn’t a simple binary opposition.” Such dichotomies maintain a division into American self and African other as well as they extend to include ‘other others;’ namely, African Americans.

In fact, the monological discourse about the African culture that dominates the mindset of the Europeans is one of the sources of the dilemma of dual identity that Ifemelu suffers. Such a discourse incites “patronizing, well-meaning pity” with no “possibility of a connection as human equals” (Ted talk). Adichie pinpoints that the advocates of the dominant culture claim that the ‘single story’ of Africa is that of “catastrophe” believing in “all kinds of shit about Africa,” (132). She further illuminates that Western literature and popular media play a crucial role in shaping imaginary preconceptions about Africa. In this regard, Africa is always depicted as “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” (Ted Talk).

In his deliberations on Joseph Conrad’s pejorative portrayal of Africa, Chinua Achebe upholds that Africa is reduced to “the role of props for the breakup of one pretty European mind” (344). As seen from the European perspective, Africa is a “setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor ... a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril.” (343-344). Achebe discloses how the Europeans undermine the potentialities of the Africans to impose their false presumptions of ‘the single story.’

Definitely, such a ‘single story’ with its stereotypical representation of other persons or countries impedes the possibilities of creating true images, labels and expectations. On their part, African Americans counteract such a ‘single story’ in two ways: either through acting like white Americans uprooting their identities from homeland or challenging deracination. In an interview conducted by Nina Shen Rastogi, Adichie proclaims that it is essential to expose the intimidations that a ‘single story’ produces and deconstruct its hegemonic imaginary percepts. The Africans must write their

own authentic African stories that debunk Western myths. More specifically, the Africans must not let the West do the naming and labeling for them. Gates emphasizes that “To rename is to revise and to revise is to signify” (xxiii). Adichie’s beliefs are embodied in Taiye Selasi’s words who states, “We Need New Names” that reiterate the need for new narratives, advocate a “refusal to oversimplify,” and reduce the cultural complexity of Africa and the Africans to definitive faulty images.

Another procedure that Adichie utilizes to counter the ‘single story’ is the real sense of reconciliation she has created with her identity as a black person. She proclaims “I’m African, happily so ... I’m comfortable in the world, and it’s not that unusual. Many Africans are happily African and don’t think they need a new term” (Barber). In contrast to such an appeasement, Mildred, a Chinese white, states “I don’t feel like I have much [of an] Asian culture. And I feel like my culture is a lot more White” (Cited in Strmic-Pawl 84). In another occasion, in her interview with Nina Shen Rastogi, Adichie affirms “I think what I’m trying to come to terms with the idea of many labels. You know, there are times when I’m quite happy to embrace the idea that I’m a feminist writer, an Igbo writer, a Nigerian writer, a black writer, blah blah blah.” It is noticeable that whenever she is in a situation where other people are patronizing, Adichie finds herself in a defensive position regarding her independent identity. Moreover, her endeavours to redefine the African image and grapple with the danger of the ‘single story’ are conducive to a new discourse on race. Yogita Goyal states that such a discourse “must be placed alongside the frame of the black Atlantic” (17).

Adichie assigns to Ifemelu the task of disrupting the premises of the ‘single story.’ *Americanah* opens with Ifemelu expressing her surprise when Kelsey asks “It’s a novel, right? What’s it about?” because she believes that any novel never tells just one story. She thus strikes out “Why [do] people ask “What is it about?” as if a narrative had to be about only one thing” (191). In her essay which she entitles, “The danger of a Single Story,” Adichie openly states explicitly her rejection of a ‘single story.’ She declares, “we realize that there is never a single story about any place, [and thus] we regain a kind of paradise.” Like Adichie, Ifemelu accepts black identity, is committed to her beliefs, and resists racial barriers. Thus, by the

end of the novel, Ifemelu emerges ultimately triumphant in her combat against deracination.

b. Braided Hair as a Driving Signifier of Heritage

In *Americanah*, the African braided hair exemplifies a controversial leitmotif of cultural nuances and racial expressions. To highlight the Africaness of her protagonist, Adichie interweaves the image of the braided hair with the story of Ifemelu's attachment to the African heritage. Respectively, African braided hair associates the personal and the political. Moreover, it dismantles the doctrines of deracination that lead the immigrants to reject African hairstyles as if this would lead them to prosper and succeed.

In fact, hairstyles can be interpreted as an individual expression of the self as well as a reflection of the communal standards. In accordance with this perspective, Catherine M. Frangie indicates that braided hair has its origins in African heritage and it goes beyond appearance since it signifies "a person's social status [and] communicate[s] important signals about a person's self-esteem and self-image" (528). Similarly, Kobena Mercer sheds more light on the function of the hair as "a key 'ethnic signifier'" (250) within the complex domain of the social codes. Along the same lines, Deborah Pergament remarks, "Hairstyles and rituals surrounding hair care and adornment tend to convey powerful messages about a person's beliefs, lifestyles, and commitments" (43-44).

In addition, in comparison to corporeal shape or facial features, hairstyles have proven to be malleable because they can be changed more easily by cultural practices. In accordance with this view, 'hair' turns into a "sensitive area of expression" (Mercer 250) caught on the crossover between self, society and culture. In her speculations regarding such perceptive interpretation of the conceptualization of 'hair' as a cultural signifier of identity, Adichie states, "I am obsessed with hair! ... I have natural, negro hair, free from relaxers and things" (qtd. in Calkin). Ifemelu likewise falls "in love with her hair" (215). With her decision to go back to Nigeria, the hairdresser Aisha asks, "Why don't you have relaxer?" To this question Ifemelu responds, "I like my hair the way God made it" (12).

Undoubtedly, Ifemelu is captivated by her hair and its embodiment of African personality.

As a matter of fact, the politics of 'black hair' emerges as one of the recurrent elements in the blogs of Ifemelu. One of the major settings of the narrative is the salons of hair braiding where there are multiple references to African hairstyles; namely, dreadlocks, afros, twists, braids, raucous curls and coils, relaxers, texturisers, oil, hair butter and pomades. In her comments on the politics of natural hair, Ifemelu expresses her pride in African hairstyles, "I have natural kinky hair. Worn in cornrows, Afros, braids. No, it's not political. No, I am not an artist or poet or singer. Not an earth mother either. I just don't want relaxers in my hair" (299). Such declaration is highly relevant because it underpins her acceptance of the natural African appearance.

The hairstyles of white women perceived as the essence of beauty and femininity is juxtaposed to the African cultural implication of hair. For black women, no hairstyle tips were offered. White women claim that black women are unprofessional and unsophisticated; nevertheless, black women implement a series of natural hair choices. A case in point is manifested in Ifemelu's various hairstyles that have distinguished her character when she was in Nigeria. Immigrating to America, she notices that there is a general tendency to urge the American Americans to adopt white women's hairstyles in order for black women to fit in mainstream America. Ifemelu regards this paradigm of discrimination as a "perfect metaphor for race in America" (299).

In this context, African women thereby embark on appropriating their hairstyles mistakenly believing that they will be acknowledged as subjects: they dye, chemically relax, straighten and sculpt their hair. Shedding light upon such a submission to the white ideals, Catherine Saint Louis, a journalist, succinctly explicates that "good hair" often implies "transforming one's tightly coiled roots ... Straightening hair has been perceived as a way to be more acceptable to certain relatives, as well as to the white establishment."

The narrative opens with an exposition of Ifemelu's ordeal of cultural readjustment into the American society. She has to undergo hair relaxation reckoning that it will work as a privilege in her interview for the job of a

backup singer in a jazz band. Auntie Uju has harangued Ifemelu to take her braids out for her interviews. Kemi also told her that she “shouldn’t wear braids to the interview” (120). She further warns her “If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional” (120). Accordingly, Ifemelu postulates, “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” (206). Enthused about her performance, Ifemelu determines to use toxic chemical relaxers and weave in bits of someone else’s hair and allow her hair to grow naturally. The hairdresser states flatteringly “Wow, girl, you’ve got the white-girl swing!” (205). After her outstanding performance in the interview, Ifemelu has got the job and the interviewer declares that “she would be a ‘wonderful fit’ in the company” (206).

Certainly, Ifemelu wonders if “the woman would have felt the same way had she walked into that office wearing her thick, kinky, God-given halo of hair, the Afro” (206). The stance of the interviewer endorses Paul Mooney’s reflections, “when black people’s hair is relaxed, white people are relaxed. When it’s nappy, they’re not happy. And I have a nappy mental attitude” (22). Consequently, it is not the merit that identifies success in America; it is how much the non-white person is abiding by the American tenets.

Indeed, the scene typifies one of the fuzzy moments in Ifemelu’s life. In spite of her adept performance in the interview, she feels deracinated and decentered as if she turns into an entirely different person with her hair “hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin” (205). Even Curt is uncertain about her identity. The narrator speculates, “The verve [has] gone. She [does] not recognize herself. She [leaves] the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser [has] 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” (205). Moreover, she tells Wambui “Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you” (210). In this vein, hair straightening changes Ifemelu’s expectations about racial equality: as a non-American Black, she has no control over the formation of her hairstyle the same way as the white Americans do. Further, it detaches her from her moorings, and engenders a state of anxiety. Such a state echoes Zora Neale

Hurston's words "It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings that I could see myself like somebody else ... Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look at that"(1).

To help Ifemelu accommodate the American racial prejudice, Wambui has recommended her to visit a natural hair Happilykinkynappy.com website designed specifically for black women. The narrator notes that those women have

message boards full of posts, thumbnail photos of black women blinking at the top. They had long trailing dreadlocks, small Afros, big Afros, twists, braids, massive raucous curls and coils. They called relaxers 'creamy crack'.... 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 sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, happy, woolly hair was normal. (214)

Ifemelu falls into this world and nurture a strong online relationship with anonymous blog readers and a group of African women who espouse natural black hair treatment free from straightening chemicals, extensions or wigs. By joining this group, Ifemelu regains self-respect and her adamant belief in her ancestral Afro tradition of hair braiding. She also grasps that she will never be absorbed into the American culture and thus it is futile to endure an awful experience of hair loss.

Evidently, Ifemelu faces up an internal conflict swinging between two splitting positions; namely, African American and/ or self-definition as Black. Her relaxation of hair accentuates her feelings of un-belonging; nevertheless, it resonates with a deep desire not to close "the doors of opportunity ... roughly in [her] face" (9). Mulling over such a muddled state of mind, she muses, "But here's the thing – in America I suddenly found out I was black. I'm black! What does that mean? Suddenly I started thinking, why do I want my hair to look like white girls' hair? This is absurd" (Calkin). In this sense, Ifemelu mirrors Olúfémí Táíwò's confused state of

mind. He declares that he undergoes a singular transformation that circumscribes his whole life as soon as he arrives in the USA: he becomes black. He therefore coins the term “newly minted blacks” to refer to the African and Caribbean immigrants being raced on arriving in America. He further cogitates that “being “black” in the United States is not given, an ontological, factitious category, but a historical construct, the product of sociogenesis” (42). Mocking the absurdity of such assumptions, Táíwò writes “It was not that my skin tone was different in Nigeria or that it took on a brand new hue when I arrived in the United States. After all, I am not a chameleon” (42). Táíwò’s argument is revealing since it refutes what Goyal identifies as the “normative and hegemonic” (16) concepts of race. In accordance with such concepts, the African multidimensional complex identity is reduced to one dimensional nonhuman being that is simply summed up in the word ‘black.’

To terminate her divided consciousness and resist cultural deracination, Ifemelu resolves to braid her hair; however, it is “unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton” that can work with her kind of hair. The main cause is that Princeton represents the “quiet” place of affluent ease with “abiding air of earned grace” (3). As a result, Ifemelu travels by taxi for miles to Trenton which she describes as “a part of the city that [has] graffiti, dank buildings and no white people” (9). The narrative ends with Ifemelu’s hair braided in a New Jersey salon in preparation for going back home after more than a decade in America. The narrator recounts “there was cement in her soul ... that “brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness” (7). With her hair braided, Ifemelu triumphantly restores her original identity.

Noticeably, hair is not simply one of the defining aspects of the physical physiognomy of the female but it also extends to the male characters. This is clear in the narrator’s description of an American who is waiting on the platform for the train. He remarks, “The graying hair on the back of his head was swept forward, a comical arrangement to disguise his bald spot” (4). The narrator exposes more detail about the white man’s hair to reveal the contradictory stereotypical percepts of classifying the rank and identity of the African American or black characters in accordance with the nature of their hair and lifestyles. The narrator writes “A dreadlocked white man sat

next to her on the train, his hair like old twine ropes that ended in a blond fuzz, his tattered shirt worn with enough piety to convince her that he was a social warrior and might make a good guest blogger” (4). The white man is not what his hair and Afro-centric manners suggest. He speaks about class conflict between the haves and have-nots and/ or the rich and the poor. Ostensibly, he connects himself with the poor and the have-nots blacks in their struggle. So Ifemelu, blurbs him and writes, “Not All Dreadlocked White American Guys Are Down.” It is ironical that the white man who is supposedly not “down with the brothas,” still harbours his racial prejudice and denies class classification. Accordingly, to assume Afro-centric ways does not imply recognition of the African culture.

c. Language as a Cultural Signifier

Language in general and accent in particular are as imperative as hair in the construction and expression of identity. Fanon remarks that to use a language denotes “to assume a culture” (8). Elleke Boehmer likewise argues that “to be cut off from a mother tongue implied a damaging loss of connection with one’s culture of origin” (197). Ifemelu recollects how her foreign accent leads to her reluctance in her response to white persons on her first day at college. This is obvious in the unfriendly gaze and scornful observation of Cristina Tomas, the girl at the college registration booth, when she hears Ifemelu’s accent that she regards as foreign and inferior.

In fact, the stance of Cristina arouses in Ifemelua sense of discouragement and dejection. She finds herself shifting from a state of self-assertive person to an imitative subordinate individual. The narrator emphasizes Ifemelu’s feelings of an ‘Other’ in his meticulous description of the physical physiognomy of Cristina. He portrays her as a gorgeous white person with “rinsed-out look ... washy blue eyes, faded hair, and pallid skin... wearing whitish tights that [make] her legs look like death” (134). In comparison to the peripheral position that Ifemelu occupies, Cristina is at the core of the scene privileged on both physical and intellectual grounds.

To debunk such a stereotyped image, the narrator contends that Ifemelu has “spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk” (134-135). However, she has shrunk “like a dried leaf” (134) in shame. Ginika tries to appease and harmonize her with such

embarrassing situation. She explains to Ifemelu: “Because this is America. You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things” (128). Ifemelu therefore speaks in an American accent and camouflages her true African identity. Rose A. Sackeyfio demonstrates that speaking a foreign twang suggests a universal pattern of coping mechanism that mirrors, “the commonality of alienation and hybridity among African émigrés” (217).

Indeed, Adichie probes the predicament of how the African foreign accent complicates college life for Ifemelu and contributes to her failure in securing a permanent job that would help her pay for her rent and tuition. She thus endures great frustration as if she is “lost in a viscous haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness. Between her and what she should feel, there [is] a gap. She care[s] about nothing. She want[s] to care, but she no longer [knows] how; it [has] slipped from her memory, the ability to care” (158). To overcome such a discouraging state, she undertakes a coping mechanism of an apparently acquiescent identity taking on an American accent. She acquires more release with Wambui’s invitation to the ASA wherein she makes friendship with diverse African students (Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, and Congolese). In the course of one of the meetings, one of the leaders comically tells the African Americans that soon they will assume an American accent as a tangible tactic to survive.

For Auntie Uju, the American accent is an apt strategy to be an acceptable subject in the dominant culture. The narrator remarks that when Dike takes an item from the shelf, Auntie Uju asks him to put it back “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” (109). The narrator proceeds, “with the accent emerge[s] a new person, apologetic and self-basing” (109). According to Sackeyfio, “African names and languages are the strongest markers of identity” (219). Nevertheless, Auntie Uju’s linguistic adjustment to the American accent disfigures her Nigerian accent.

Certainly, Auntie Uju’s voicing of deracinating thoughts and prohibition of talking in Igbo to Dike stuns Ifemelu. She vehemently admonishes Ifemelu, “Please don’t speak Igbo to him... Two languages will confuse him” (110). Nevertheless, Ifemelu perseveres to restore the Nigerian language of Auntie Uju: “We spoke two languages growing up” (110).

Completely swamped in the dominant culture, Auntie Uju replies that they have to be different because “This is America. It’s different” (110). Indeed, assuming English names and prohibiting African languages deliberately “attempt to erase [Auntie Uju’s] identity and cultural heritage” (Sackeyfio 219)

Similarly, with the absence of his Nigerian cultural anchorage, Dike undergoes an identity ordeal. His mother has never told him about his father, gives him her surname and forbids him to speak Igbo that she uses only when she is angry, “I will send you back to Nigeria if you do that again!” (173). This threatening manner instigates Ifemelu’s worries that the Igbo language will become a language of dissension and strife. It also enables her to grasp Dike’s superficiality and shallowness of thoughts. After moving to Massachusetts, Dike is no longer transparent because “something [has] filmed itself around him, making him difficult to read, his head perennially bent towards his Game Boy, looking up once in a while to view his mother, and the world, with a weariness too heavy for a child. His grades [are] falling” (173). In addition, his teachers mark him as different and aggressive in class. Intolerant stances against Dike culminate in the discriminatory attitude of his group leader Haley who gives sunscreen to everyone except Dike claiming that Dike “[does] not need it” (185). Such overt discrimination contributes to Dike’s sense of alienation and estrangement that are fostered by his classmates jokingly asking him to get “some weed” (350). This humiliating scene thereby drives Dike to attempt suicide, and shatters the hopes of the recognition of Non-American blacks as subjects.

Unlike Auntie Uju who aspires to be utterly assimilated into the American culture, Ifemelu undertakes to stop faking an American accent and taking on “a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers” (177). Endorsing a foreign accent tends to “assert [Ifemelu’s] identity as a Nigerian” (20) as presumed by Bimbola Oluwafunlola Idowu-Faith. This resolve is not rooted in her inability to take on the American accent, but it is a deliberate act of will. Testifying to this fact, the narrator explains, “She [has] perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with “so,” and the sliding response of “oh really” (175). Yet, she feels uncomfortable with herself when she speaks

American English. She thus begins to reflect on her former speech behaviour and analyzes peculiar American expressions such as 'I know' (4) which professes agreement rather than knowledge.

Actually, for Ifemelu, challenging deracination from her own African voice and stopping speaking in an American accent represents a sturdy combat. It is a wake-up phone call conversation with a telemarketer that drives Ifemelu to grasp how she is deracinated from her Nigerian identity and "shrunk like a small, defeated animal" (177). Once, the telemarketer identifies her accent as "totally American" (177), she begins "to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words "You sound American" into a garland that she hung around her own neck" (177). For her, the scene is problematic: on the one hand, she considers normal native-like speech in itself a genuine triumph. On the other hand, the incident represents a turning point that she seizes in order to regain her authentic accent. Consequently, Ifemelu decides to be herself and stops faking American English to "open a path to healing as she recoils from her fragmented and confused identity" (Sackeyfio 218). In contrast, her boyfriend Blaine begins to use "the kind of American English that ... [has] made race pollsters on the telephone assume that [Ifemelu is] white and educated" (179). Hence, she finds Blaine utterly absorbed into the American life and incapable of disrupting the American Black-White dichotomy.

Adichie's exposition of the wide spectrum of opinions on language and accent shifts the setting from America to the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, she features an exquisite treatment of accent as a cultural signifier through the perception of Obinze and his friend Emenike, Nicholas and Ojiugo who typically parallel Auntie Uju. They both reject their original native language in order to be seen as American subjects. In the same vein of Auntie Uju, Nicholas speaks to his daughters Nne and Nna "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" (241). Both Nicholas and Ojiugo are proud of the British accent of their children. Hosain argues that they are "prouder of Western Culture than those who were born into it" (129). Additionally, Ojiugo repeats the words of her daughters in an exaggerated British accent and states, "You see how she sounds so posh? Ha! My daughter will go places.

That is why all our money is going to Brentwood School” (243). Ironically, Nne’s Russian friend, likewise, is “trying to pretend that she did not have a Russian accent, being more British than the British!” (244).

As a matter of fact, in her justification of the reprimand of her children for using their authentic accent, Ojiugo elucidates that it is not about accents. She explains, “It is because in Nigeria, people teach their children fear instead of respect. We don’t want them to fear us but that does not mean we take rubbish from them. We punish them. The boy knows I will slap him if he does any nonsense. Seriously slap him” (245). Witnessing the ending in Ojiugo’s loud kisses on Nne’s forehead, Obinze realizes that Nicholas and Ojiugo are contented with their split personalities and endeavour to renounce as much of their blackness as possible. However, they feel comfortable with their deracination “from [their] originary culture” (140) as stated by Adesanmi. On a deeper level, Ojiugo idealizes the American norms at the expense of her black ethnicity that she devalues.

In a similar move to Ojiugo’s, Emenike, who is married to a British woman, undervalues his Nigerian culture. He mockingly unburdens, “I miss Naija. It’s been so long but I just haven’t had the time to travel back home. Besides, Georgina would not survive a visit to Nigeria!” (267). Furthermore, he contemptuously portrays his homeland as “the jungle and himself as interpreter of the jungle” (267). Another story that is closely concomitant with the depreciation of the Nigerian culture and the amplification of British accent is that of Chika, one of Nicholas’s friends. She narrates that she has met a “so bush” Nigerian man who grew in Onitsha. She tells Nicholas “you can imagine what kind of bush accent he has. He mixes up *ch* and *sh*. I want to go to the *chopping* center. Sit down on a *sheer*” (246).

Unlike Nicholas, Ojiugo and Chika, Ifemelu, adheres to her Nigerian anchorage; thus, she is capable of recapturing her identity. She opposes the above-mentioned humiliating conceptions of Africa as one of the zones which is primitive and needy. Therefore, she rejects the job offered by the chairman of the charity board in Ghana. Elaborating on her refusal, the narrator overtly remarks that Ifemelu “want[s] ... desperately, to be from the country of people who [give] and not those who receive, to be one of those who [have] and [can] therefore bask in the grace of having given, to be among those who [can] afford copious pity and empathy” (172). Beneath

such declaration lies a defiant approach against degradation and humiliation that coincides with a deep sense of self-respect, dignity and pride of who she is.

d. Blogs: Refurbishment of the Nigerian Identity

In *Americanah*, the utility of blogs clears up the resonance of digital sphere and technological media in globalizing postcolonial discourse, shaping a public opinion and making “the writer’s public persona ‘viral’ through the Web” (Guarracino, “Postcolonial” 111). Blogs thus render a kind of “participatory culture ... in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins 290) on racial issues. This, in turn, disrupts the mono-sided author to reader relationship. It creates instead a dialogic correlation in which the text, in Roland Barthes terms, turns writerly and open for the reader who gives up the role of consumer to embrace the active role of a producer and collaborator in formulating meaning (4). Therefore, the audience becomes innovative and undertakes to actively grip “its meaning by contrasting its experience with the one-directional flows of information it receives” (132) as noted by Manuel Castells. The text thereby invokes multi-sided exegeses and interpretations.

When asked in the “International Author’s Stage” (2014) about the role of the protagonist as a blogger, Adichie retorts that she wants *Americanah* to be a social commentary “in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction” (Guarracino 2). On the same plane, in her forethoughts on Adichie’s implementation of blogs, Rita Kiki Edozie debates that they are functional in many respects. Firstly, they reverberate “Adichie’s own resolve to reveal African immigrants’ growing identification with the racial experience in the US.” Secondly, they “serve to present the African voice, observations, and perspectives on race that have normally been crowded out by the African American voice.” Thirdly, they “educate fellow African immigrants about the importance and significance of race to their lives in America as new African Diasporas” (72).

In the light of the abovementioned reflections, *Americanah* outlines an experimental way of thinking about blogs as a metanarrative interchange with fiction; namely, Adichie infuses them with the narrative moving back and forth from the former to the latter and vice versa. Commenting on such

artistic faculty, Lombardi presumes that in her blogs, “Ifemelu takes on her craft as an anthropologist, but consistently goes back and forth between being an outsider looking into something that is separate from herself and realizing the political nature of her own physicality and its embedment in the subject of her work” (32). Respectively, Ifemelu locates a “space both embedded in but also outside creative writing, and as a place where social realities of race can be discussed without the trappings of character and action” (Guarracino, “Writing” 2). In this way, her blogs enlighten the Americans as well as the African immigrants of what it means to be a foreigner or an outsider.

The idea of blogging crops up in a long email which Ifemelu shares with Wambui. In this email, she unfolds how she comes across a series of awful occurrences in America; for example, racial bigotry, failure in obtaining a permanent regular job, selling her body to pay the rent, and the split with almost all of her boyfriends including Blaine, Curt, and Obinze. Stirred by Ifemelu’s rich experience, Wambui’s responds, “This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog” (299).

In her blogs, Ifemelu appears as prudent blogger. She has proven talented enough to endure the intellectual pressures and incongruent realities within the western landscape wherein blackness is marked by shame and disgrace. She does not only probe how the Americans are aversive, but also how they discard any argument or debate about race altogether and “find excuses to subvert discussions about race by fobbing it off as complex, really about ‘culture,’ about ‘class’ and being ‘urban’ and poor and—not wanting to provoke ‘racially charged’ situations” (Edozie 72). According to this view, non-whites have been depersonalized beyond recognition due to the American dichotomous paradigms that view them in binary terms.

Through her strategy of blogging, Ifemelu ably pierces into multilayered narratives of cultural differences that have brought about the dilemmas of double consciousness, assimilation and distinct identity within the world of the diaspora. Also, Ifemelu does not merely tell “nuance of social interaction within a particular kind of liberal elite” (Day), but also, as contended by Barbara Kay, she wrinkles out “the foibles, double standards, self-righteousness and chauvinism of every group she finds herself amongst.” She fosters informative dialogues of such issues to international

platform manipulating the manifold interconnected relationships between relatives, friends, schoolmates, blacks and whites, and blacks themselves. In this regard, she tactfully formulates intermingled, hybrid and constructive blogs that “bring together storytelling, reportage, and emotional value” (Guarracino, “Writing” 14). In her *Blog Theory*, Jodi Dean expands on the specificity of blog productivity: “blogs offer exposure and anonymity at the same time. As bloggers we expose ourselves, our feelings and experiences, loves and hates, desires and aversions” (72). Hence, blogs add profundity to *Americanah* in their meta-critical and insightful ruminations on both the social and political spectrums.

Ifemelu’s blog, “Race-teenth or Various *Observations* about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black” (4, *emphasis added*) is among the blogs notable for its emblematic title. She has written this blog in response to a female poet from Haiti who claims that race was never an issue in her relationship with a white man for three years in California. Ifemelu repudiates the female poet’s presumptions as follows,

The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. 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. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. (292)

In the above quotation, Ifemelu explains how in America the prevalence of heterogeneous cultures is not given due attention. The issue of race is complicated by the fact that racial boundaries are blurred within the black-white romantic sphere; however, outside it they loom large. Furthermore, it is customary for the assimilationist blacks in transnational spaces to succumb and keep silent about race matters; otherwise, they will not be accepted and will be labeled as “too sensitive.”

Other blogs are introduced under the entry “Understanding America for the Non-American Black” accompanied by variant suggestive subtitles like “What Hispanic Means,” “American Tribalism,” “What Do WASPs Aspire To?,” “A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean,” and “Thoughts on the Special White Friend.” Clearly, the titles of the blogs feature a

reflective devotion to live up to her online blog persona and her followers nurturing them with fresh ideas. They also draw the attention of fellow African immigrants to the socially constructed nature of race and its significance for their lives in America. In line with this view, the inserted blogs maintain a “message for an older generation of African immigrants who are parents to a more youthful cohort of American-born Africans who experience race more commonly with historic African Americans” (Edozie 72).

Indeed, in her blogs, Ifemelu emerges as a detached objective observer who ably provides painstaking perceptions on politics and race. This fact is obvious with the opening of *Americanah*. To fit in the observer’s role, Adichie arms Ifemelu with the supreme faculty of sharp surveillance of the vulture. Like the vulture, she seems to hack into “the carcasses of people’s stories for something she could use” (5). She asserts such a role in her response to Blaine’s demand to make her blogs more academic claiming that people are not reading them as entertainment but as cultural observations and commentaries. Moreover, he wants her to insert “details about government policy and redistricting” rather than the “Darkest, Drabbest Parts of American Cities Full of American Blacks. Yet, Ifemelu replies, “I don’t want to explain; I want to observe” (313). Besides, her observations are not accusatory and prove instructive, witty and droll enough to stimulate and stir up people to re-think taken for granted assumptions. Also they artistically drive the narrative instead of the characters or the plot.

The exceptional ingenuity of Ifemelu as a blogger emerges in presenting her blogs in the form of sweeping lectures that tread unexplored territories and deconstruct the black/white binary paradigm. This is discernable in the blogs addressed to white and non-white races advising them on how to behave and co-exist in America. In one of the most provocative blogs titled “To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby,” Ifemelu lectures the “Non-American Black” affirming that it is their own choice or decision to come to America wherein they are identified as black. She further spells out that it is America that imposes blackness to deny the other non-white races access into the mainstream culture. Here, Ifemelu insinuates that Non-American Blacks still have another option: it is to

counter the American blemishing racist doctrines and go back home rather than suppressing their identity and mimicking the American language, dress, culture and politics.

Rationalizing her premises, Ifemelu explains that Non-American Blacks identify themselves in terms of their ethnicity and religion in their countries. However, in America they are classified only on overt and direct race grounds. In this way, they acquire a new identity devalued because it is associated with negative attributes. She thus exhorts them to stop conceiving themselves as different, “saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian” since “America doesn’t care” (222).

The postulations of Ifemelu on racial encounters extend to white Americans or what she calls American Non-Blacks. She addresses them in an entry titled “Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness.” This blog encompasses three pages exposing the codes and rules for how the American whites should talk about race and how they should behave toward the American Blacks if they tell them about their blackness in America. She further points out that they have to stop saying “Oh, it’s not really *race*, it’s class. Oh, it’s not *race*, it’s gender. Oh, it’s not *race*, it’s the cookie monster ... [We’re] color-blind” (326-327). At this point, Ifemelu unmasks the American claims of multi-racial democracy and the propagation of racial equality or “color blindness.” To support her argument, Ifemelu confers, “Don’t preface your response with ‘One of my best friends is black’ ... you can have a black best friend and still do racist shit and it’s probably not true anyway, the ‘best’ part, not the ‘friend’ part” (327). Ifemelu in fact rejects the Americans’ fallacious hypotheses and the way they validate the racist and chauvinistic deeds they practice under the guise of friendship and fraternity.

Despite the success of Ifemelu as a professional and an insightful blogger, she lacks a sense of wholeness and feels that she fails in dealing with the racial predicament. Under the influence of her white and black boyfriends, she emerges almost assimilated and Americanized with respect to her views on the world. Elaborating on such a metamorphosis in her character, the narrator remarks that Ifemelu sometimes makes “fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself. The more she [writes], the less sure she [becomes]. Each post scrap[s] off yet one more scale of self until she [feels] naked and false” (5). In addition, she starts appraising the

American politics and lifestyles of high societies. The victory of Obama as a president of the USA has saturated Ifemelu with powerful feelings that correspond to those experienced by the American citizens themselves. Outwardly, Ifemelu is Americanized in many respects; nevertheless, part of her roots is still intact and thus she decides to terminate the 'Americanah' way of life so as to reaffirm her 'Africanah.' The process involves keeping an eye on home as the crucible of integrity and whole identity. Subsequently, her blog writings come to an abrupt end and disappear.

It is conspicuous that African Americans and African immigrants have assumed sundry approaches to counter deracination and do not “share the same notions of affiliation” (55) as noted by Louis Chude-Sokei. However, Uju and Nicholas have never thought of challenging deracination or going back home. On the contrary, they have endured critical pressures and have incessantly implemented assimilation and absorption as strategies to survive in America. Yet, Ifemelu and Obinze have not been swamped in the Western culture. Both return home; albeit, in the background each one has variant incentives beneath homecoming. In the case of Ifemelu, she challenges deracination manipulating diverse politics. Instead, she espouses the disposition of ‘homecoming.’ Such a decision is fortified by her adamant commitment to her cultural moorings as the sole alternative. Additionally, deracination has provided her with “the self-reflexive distance required to discern the past in the present, the concrete in the abstract, the local in the universal” (Pinar 60). In her return home, she is fomented neither by her failure in America nor home crises. She merely wants to go back home since she discovers the truth about America: it is “wonderful but it’s not heaven;” (119) or the Promised Land that everyone or Americanah celebrates and makes it out to be. In accordance with the narrator’s view, Emily Raboteau suggests that the ultimate concern of Ifemelu “isn’t the challenge of becoming American or the hyphenation that requires, but the challenge of going back home.”

With respect to Obinze, his drive of going back home is mandatory. He has been forced to return home due to the fake papers that authorized him securing a job under the name of someone else. In consequence of his refusal to be blackmailed by the person under whose name he works, he is jailed and sent back home. At home, he emerges as a successful estate

developer reflecting on the differences between Nigeria, America and Europe especially in architectural choices. He conceives that the Nigerians, unlike the Westerners, avoid renovated houses. Hence, Obinze manipulates such aesthetic choices to juxtapose the country's history and the current moment. In his perspective, modernization of houses does not only obliterate architectural history but also cultural history. He proclaims,

Nigerians don't buy houses because they're old. A renovated two hundred year old mill granary, you know, the kind of things Europeans like. It doesn't work here at all. But of course it makes sense because we are Third Worlder and third Worlders are forward looking. We like things to be new, because our best is still ahead, while in the West their best is already past and so they have to make a fetish of that past. (436)

Obinze's viewpoint foreshadows a note to reorient the "Third Worlders" in general and the Nigerians in particular to realize their dreams of constructing their future on their native land. They also have to resist Western deracination that constantly seeks to uproot them and efface their heritage and past. Obinze further affirms that there is a need to cling to the original identity, to evade over-dependency on the west, and to deconstruct the binary dichotomies that locate the Africans invisible at the bottom of the social hierarchy in occidental spaces.

Obinze exports such glimpses of hope to Ifemelu; thus, she decides to resign from her job and starts blogging onto another disgruntled persona piercing into the intricacy of several aspects of the Nigerian life that require reformation and restructuring. Asked by her boyfriend if her blogging is about race, Ifemelu retorts, "No, just about life. Race doesn't really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (475). Olúfémí Táíwò has the same sentiment toward his homeland; "All my life in Nigeria, I lived as a Yorùbá, a Nigerian, an African, and a human being. I occupied, by turns, several different roles" (41). Only in America, both Ifemelu and Táíwò feel that they are 'minted' with blackness.

Ifemelu elucidates the issue of nostalgia and homesickness through the perception of the returnees and/ or 'Americanah' whom she accompanies at

the Nigeropolitan club in Lagos. They are characterized by their lack of any emotional feelings or depth toward their homeland. Also, they are unremittingly critical of their native homeland, devalue it and see it with an American lens. They speak badly of Nigeria the same way as the students of African associations are sarcastic of Africa “trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity,” (140). Moreover, they express their contempt for the Nigerian milieu and long for the American amenities such as “Low-fat soy milk, NPR, fast Internet” (408) and decent vegetarian restaurants. They also mimic the Americans in claiming that they are the sanctified who have come “back home with an extra gleaming layer” (408). Ifemelu defines them sarcastically as “a group of young returnees who gather every week to moan about the many ways that Lagos is not like New York as though Lagos had even been close to being New York” (421). Unequivocally, those returnees have succumbed to the fake lures of the West and consequently they are utterly assimilated and deracinated as well.

Ifemelu communicates her speculations on the pitfalls of the returnees in a new blog titled “The Small Redemptions of Lagos.” In this blog, she asserts her identity as a Nigerian “I am one of them” and that “Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York... Lagos has always been indisputably itself” (421). Assuming the role of an outsider, Ifemelu reprimands the returnees,

Go back where you came from! If your cook cannot make the perfect Panini, it is not because he is stupid. It is because Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich-eating people ... And Nigeria is not ... a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single of soup, and it is called assorted and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of here is just that assorted. (421)

The blog is highly sagacious and edifying. It features how Ifemelu redeems the unrealistic image of her homeland and her Nigerian people who are recurrently depicted as subaltern deserving donations due to their poverty, Aids and social maladies. On the contrary, she regards her homeland as a continent of beautiful landscapes and “incomprehensible”

people. Therefore, she chides the returnees for not only shedding their African identity and assuming a new one, but also devaluing their homeland. She also lifts the lid off the fundamental momentums that lurk beneath returnees' homecoming; "Most of [them] have come back to make money in Nigeria, to start business, to seek government contracts and contacts. Others have come with dreams in their pockets and a hunger to change the country" (421). Hence, they are not nostalgically or culturally propelled in their homecoming, but materialistically driven. For Ifemelu, the state of mind of the returnees can be concisely read in "You're always nostalgic for the land of your youth ... and when you go back, it's for all changed. Finally you belong in your skin" (qtd. in Mandel 232). Hence, she corroborates the compelling need to renew the "heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again" (140). In her exploration of her roots in America, she recalls T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" which reads "We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time" (208, Part V: Lines 26-30). It is a genuine invocation for continual resistance of the quandary of deracination and assimilation that uproot the immigrants from their culture and heritage and thus bring about disintegrated and cracked identities.

Conclusion

As a Black American immigrant, Ifemelu undergoes a process of cultural deracination. In America, she feels that the multicultural dimensions of her identity are reduced to one-dimensional entity marked exclusively by the colour of her skin. She endures the financial, emotional and racial pressures and barriers and decides voluntarily to go back home after more than a decade in USA. This volition is explicitly indicated in the title 'Americanah' that connotes only one path for the protagonist to pursue; to go back home where she belongs. However, returning home is not an easy task since she has to grapple with a discovery of resistant politics that help her challenge the American lures of assimilation and affirm her commitment to her moorings. She manipulates all the potential cultural and technological tools, such as blogging, to counter deracination. She thus terminates her double consciousness with an adamant belief and confidence in her national signifiers such as language, hairstyles, clothes, norms, names, architecture

and other signifiers of homeland. Correspondingly, Ifemelu emerges triumphant in maintaining her ancestral identity, whereas other African Americans such as Aunty Uju and Nicholas fail in their encounter with the Western deracination and succumb to negation and deracination,

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