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Otherness and the Diasporic Subject in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi

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ABSTRACT

Lo scopo di questa tesi è quello di indagare i temi dell'alterità e della costruzione dell'identità dei soggetti coinvolti nella Nuova Diaspora Africana negli Stati Uniti attraverso l'analisi dei romanzi *Americanah* di Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie e *Ghana Must Go* di Taiye Selasi.

Dopo una breve introduzione sulla Nuova Diaspora Africana e sulle sue produzioni letterarie, usando come punto di partenza il saggio di Taiye Selasi "Who is an Afropolitan?" (2005), verrà discusso di come sia necessaria una prospettiva trasversale e transnazionale per comprendere la complessità dell'identità dei soggetti diasporici; questa è, infatti, formata dalla somma di esperienze transculturali che sono una conseguenza del legame che i soggetti coinvolti mantengono con diversi paesi, della loro appartenenza a diverse culture e dall'utilizzo di diverse lingue.

Americanah di Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie e *Ghana Must Go* di Taiye Selasi, entrambi pubblicati nel 2013, narrano le storie di personaggi che gravitano intorno a mondi differenti e che si muovono avanti e indietro tra Africa, Europa e Stati Uniti. Attraverso il racconto delle vite ibride di Ifemelu e dei membri della famiglia Sai, entrambe le autrici danno voce a tutte quelle persone che devono fronteggiare ogni giorno un ampio spettro di problemi legati alla nerezza e all'identità diasporica tra i quali assumono un particolare rilievo i processi di assimilazione e l'acquisizione della consapevolezza dalla propria ibridità culturale. I loro personaggi, impegnati nella ricerca della loro identità e del loro posto nel mondo, si trovano ad affrontare una serie di pregiudizi basati sulla razza, sulla percezione dei loro corpi e sul loro successo lavorativo o accademico.

Adichie e Selasi, che hanno vissuto in prima persona l'esperienza della migrazione venendo a contatto con quella diversità che le ha portate ad avere un'identità complessa e ibrida, dimostrano attraverso la loro produzione letteraria quanto sia importante la rappresentazione per sconfiggere la narrazione semplificata o distorta di minoranze come quelle provenienti dall'Africa.

I loro romanzi possono, quindi, essere considerati come un mezzo di dialogo tra nazioni e culture e come un primo passo verso una comunicazione globale che possa dare origine a una nuova era di pace e armonia.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to explore the themes of otherness and identity of the subjects involved in the New African Diaspora through the analysis of two novels: *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi.

Both novels were published in 2013 and present a group of characters who gravitate around different worlds, as they go back and forth from Africa, Europe and the United States. They are both partly autobiographical and using some elements of their authors lives they give voice to a generation of young Africans or young people of African descent whose hybridized existences place them among the people who have to struggle to understand the complexity of a transnational and global existence.

To fully understand Adichie and Selasi's discourse about identity it is necessary to step back and to introduce the history of the New African Diaspora, for this reason, the first chapter focuses on the definition of some key concept like the definition of diaspora, on some brief historical notes of the New African Diaspora and on the description of the Afropolitan subject and of his literary production.

The reasoning about the concept of Diaspora and the description of the people involved in this process are mainly based on Robin Cohen *Global diasporas: An Introduction* (2008) in which he defines different kinds of diasporas on the basis of the subjects involved and the causes of the immigration.

Among them, the New African Diaspora is a recent kind of migration from the African continent, mainly to the United States or Europe, that is not caused by external or traumatic forces, like slavery or persecution, but by voluntary movement. In contrast with the people involved in the Black Atlantic, the ones participating in the New African Diaspora have the power of mobility and the possibility to return home; thus, the homeland remains accessible and does not become an unfamiliar but mythologized place impossible to return to.

As a consequence, the subjects involved develop a connection to different countries, to multiple cultures and to various languages; this connection is what gives birth to the Afropolitan subject. The definition of Afropolitan, a shorthand for African and cosmopolitan, was first given by Taiye Selasi in her article "Bye Bye Babar (Or What is An Afropolitan" published in 2005 and was then enriched by the Cameroonian

philosopher Achille Mbembe (2007), who suggested to use it to rethink the idea of Africanness and who linked the concept to the peculiarity of those African people who are able to occupy several cultural spaces. In fact, Afropolitanism is the sum of the many ways in which Africans or people of African origin "understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart" since "historically, Africa has been defined in the Hegelian paradigm as out of history, as not belonging to the world" (Balakrishnan 2016, 29).

This is the framework of a new trend of literature produced by novelists belonging to the generation of diasporic and Afropolitan subjects who are involved in the process of creating cultural bridges between the African continent and other Western countries (Gikandi 2011, 11). These authors' literary production can be described using several labels as it belongs simultaneously to a migrant, global and postcolonial literature and can also be labeled as African American literature; since these works are highly transversal and comprehensible only through a transnational perspective, they "comprise a genre of literature that mirrors the transformative nature of African experiences in the global environment of today's world" (Emenyonu 2017, 213).

Among these authors it must be cited the famous "afropolitan" Taiye Selasi and Teju Cole, the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Zimbabwean NoViolet Bulawayo, the global-Igbo Chris Abani, the Ethiopians Dinaw Mengestu and Abraham Verghese and the emergents Lesley Nneka Arimah, Akwaeke Emezi, Yaa Gyasi, Imbolo Mbue e Chinelo Okparanta, among others (Bordin 2020, 22).

After this theoretical introduction in Chapter 1, my thesis proceeds with the analysis of two novels; in the two chapters that follow, I highlights how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi in *Ghana Must Go* explore all the issues related to Blackness, to diasporic identity and how they try to pacify the Black American and African-American's world. In fact, these novels reveal some important insights about the assimilation experiences of African immigrants and both allude to the fact that the phenomenon of transnationalism is intricately connected with the assimilation experiences of African immigrants.

In Chapter 2, after a brief presentation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, considered by scholars as "the leading and most engaging voice of her era" because "she has bridged gaps and introduced new motifs and narrative varieties that have energized

contemporary African fiction since her first novel" (Emenyonu 2017, 1), I introduce her novel *Americanah.* The novel is considered as one of the most outstanding example of postcolonial and also Afropolitan novel written by a woman who embodies the perfect example of a cosmopolitan, well educated, Black woman who writes to give voice to a generation of young Black people who are not victim of a forced diaspora but who choose to travel, to study abroad and to increase their social condition.

Americanah is the story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian girl who moves to the United States to attend college and, once there, has to deal with her Blackness and with all the problems related to it. Ifemelu soon becomes a blogger and embarks on a journey that, passing through the exploration of the concept of race and identity, will lead her to the discovery of the complexity of herself and her fellow African immigrants. First of all, I will talk about Ifemelu's discovery of race in the United States and its embedded position in American society. Then, I will show how, using Ifemelu's blog, the author narrates how the issues of race and racism, class and white privilege intersect with one another and have a strong influence on American society and its structure. Ultimately, I show how in *Americanah*, Adichie uses hair as a metaphor for race in the U.S. in order to express what it means for Ifemelu to be Black, and how this experience of Blackness influences her process of self-knowledge and identity construction.

As I will discuss later, body-related issues play a central role in the construction of the diasporic identity and they are often related with traumatic events that determine the alienation of the diasporic subjects. Particularly, Adichie uses hair-related issues to explore Ifemelu's awareness about her ethnic identity and her subjectivity.

In the third section, I argue how Adichie uses Ifemelu's blog as a means of dialogue between the Old and the New Diaspora; in fact, she employs it to explore several postcolonial issues like, for example, White privilege. By using the point of view of the "outsider within", she observes and describes the society she is living in and asks her audience to express his points of view to start a conversation among all those who suffer or experience similar things. It will be, furthermore, shown how President Barack Obama represents a symbolic figure used to connect different generations of diasporic Black people.

In the third chapter I analyze Taiye Selasi's debut novel *Ghana Must Go*. As already mentioned, since the novel is partly autobiographical, I will make a short

digression into Selasi’s biography. In fact, as she defines herself, she is an African of the world: daughter of a Ghanaian and a Nigerian Doctor, she was born in London and raised in the United States, she has traveled the world and lived in many places and continents. As a consequence, as she affirms in the iconic article *Bye Bye Babar* (2005),

> “Afropolitan must form an identity along three dimensions: national, racial, cultural—with subtle tensions in between. While our parents can claim one country as home, we must define our relationship to the places we live: how British or American we are (or act) is in part a matter of affect. Often unconsciously, and over time, we choose which bits of a national identity (from passport to pronunciation) we internalize as central to our personalities. So, too, the way we see our race—whether black or biracial or none of the above—is a question of politics, rather than pigment;” (Selasi 2005, 530).

In the second section, I introduce *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi’s novel whose title refers to the plastic tote bag used by Ghanaian people expelled from Nigeria under the government of Shehu Shagari. The novel follows the vicissitudes of the Sai family and opens with the death of Kweku Sai a renowned heart surgeon who ironically dies of heart attack. Through flashbacks and shifts in time, Selasi presents us a dysfunctional family of six in which, despite academic or working success, every one of the members has to struggle with his own identity and with a feeling of never belonging.

According to Rosemary Marangoly George’s description of the immigrant genre (1996), *Ghana Must Go* fit in the definition given by the author since politics and the experience of location (or rather dislocation) are the central narrative. The novels of the Immigrant Genre are, furthermore, marked by a disregard for national schemes, by the use of a multigenerational cast of characters and a narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes, for example plots that involve several generations. But, above all, as it will be seen in Selasi's novel, there is often a reference to the baggage metaphor and to homelessness.

The third and the fourth section of the chapter are a deeper insight on the theme of displacement and “about dislocation and the potential alienation of the individual from both old norms and new context” (White 1995, 6). Throughout the novel there is a nearly obsessive quest for home: Kweku and Fola leave their countries to reach the

United States to find better education and career opportunities, abandoning their homes and while their sons and daughters will show a similar feeling of displacement that is instead caused by their cultural hybridity. When the Sai family travel to Ghana to attend Kweku's funeral they undertake a journey towards a process of dealing with their personal demons. As Yogita Goyal argues, this trip to Ghana reverses the Heart of Darkness narrative, in fact "the heart of darkness narrative" is the one in which "rather than Europeans or North Americans going to Africa to find themselves, an African character travels to the heart of the West, only to find darkness there" (2014, xii). It is only through this last trip to Ghana that all the members of the family are able to find some peace after moving beyond traumas.

Though born in the United States, the four Sai children, as sons and daughters of immigrants, often feel out of place and struggle to find their identity; they struggle with their skin color, with their academic and working success, they are not able to feel at home anywhere and they feel rootless. When they embrace their inheritance and understand to be cosmopolitan African American of the world, they are finally able to find some peace together as a family.

The last chapter of my thesis focuses on otherness and the identity of the diasporic subject in the two novels presented. In Adichie's *Americanah* and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* flow all the fluidity of the present age, in fact, they show the confluence of global culture, the mobility and the nomadic nature of the man of our time and the need to dismantle a monolithic culture in favor of a polyvalent society. Firstly, I give a brief definition of otherness and of the process of "Othering" which in postcolonial theory refers to the colonized others who are "marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the center and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ego" (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 168). Then I display how the authors use topics like success anxiety, Blackness, the return to Africa and self-understanding as ways of complicating the meaning of being African or from Africa.

Considering the above, it can be affirmed that Adichie and Selasi are definitely transcultural writers, who by choice or by life circumstances, have experienced cultural dislocation and transnational experiences involving multiple cultures and territories. They have been exposed to diversity that has created their plural and flexible identities and their literary production can be conceived as a dialogue beyond the borders of

nations and across cultures, the first step to start a communication among people and cultures to engender a new peace and harmony.

1. THE NEW AFRICAN DIASPORA AND AFROPOLITANISM

1.1 The Concept of Diaspora

The term diaspora derives from the Greek *dia,* "through", and *speirein*, "to scatter", and implies a phenomenon of dispersion that occurs from a "home", a center (Brah 1996, 178).

The concept of diaspora has been widely theorized; one of the scholars involved in its theorization is Robin Cohen, who identifies five different kinds of diasporas: the first is the "victim diaspora" as the classical form of diaspora whose origin was determined by a significant shocking event in the home country and in which the traumatic experience is responsible for the dispersal of the population; some of the examples of the groups which are considered victims of diasporas because of their historical traumas are the Jews, Africans, Armenians, the Irish, and Palestinians (2008, 2). These diasporic groups share two main elements which consist of "the traumatic dispersal from an original homeland and the salience of the homeland in the collective memory of a forcibly dispersed group" (Cohen 2008, 4). The second is the "labour diaspora" that occurs when a great number of people migrate in search of work and economic opportunities, such as the Indian and Turkish diasporas; the third is the "trade diaspora" that concerns migrations seeking to open trades and links such as the Chinese and Lebanese ones; the fourth is the "imperial diaspora" that regards migrations among those keen to serve and maintain empires such as the British and French diasporas; the fifth, and last, is the "cultural diaspora" that involves those who move through a process of chain migration such as the Caribbean diaspora.

As Cohen outlines in his *Global Diasporas* (2008), diaspora studies have undergone different phases and scholars are still debating to define what constitutes a diaspora. The term was originally used to refer to the study of the Jewish experience and it was only from the 1960s and 1970s that the meaning was also used to describe the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish.

During the 1980s, thanks to William Safran, the term began to be used to describe different categories of people such as political refugees, expatriates, immigrants and

ethnic and racial minorities. During the following decades, scholars of diaspora studies argued that the meaning of the term needed to be widened to properly describe the increased complexity and fragmentation of postmodern world identities.

To fully understand the importance of the debate, it is important to underline that although today identities are much more deterritorialized and complex, ideas of home, or homeland, are still powerful discussions that need to be taken into account when defining diasporas (Cohen 2008, 1-2) and, as Cohen argues, a response to the problem of defining diasporas is to consider multicultural, hybrid and fragmented identities not separated by their attachment to place that characterizes diasporic life (2008, 11).

To define diaspora, Cohen suggests using some criteria related to social structures, historical experience, and personal experiences. Among these criteria we can list, for example, the unwillingness to merge with locals, and therefore to maintain prior identity by refusing to change ethnically recognizable names or to avoid local social practices like religion, or avoiding intermarriage, because “A strong or renewed tie to the past or a block to assimilation in the present and future must exist in order to permit a diasporic consciousness to emerge” (Cohen, 2008, 16).

Among the many diasporas of the world, in the next paragraph, I will briefly describe the New Black Diaspora.

1.2 The New African Diaspora

The term “African diaspora” emerged between the 1950s and 1960s to refer to the mobilization of African people. In this paragraph I will focus on the so-called New African Diaspora, an expression used to refer to a recent kind of migration that is not caused by external or traumatic forces, like slavery or persecution, but by voluntary movement and in which the majority of the people involved have the agency to decide where to go and whether to come back while they have the chance to maintain a strong connection with their homes. In fact, according to Maximiliam Feldner: “What distinguishes the New African Diaspora is the possibility of return. In contrast to other diasporic formations, where the old homeland is usually an unfamiliar but mythologized

place impossible to return to, the new African diaspora is well connected with their homeland” (2019, 16).

The concept of diaspora is crucial for the definition of Afropolitanism, a shorthand for African and cosmopolitan that I will introduce in the next paragraph, because it expresses the idea of the movement which is a constituent feature of African culture since pre-colonial times and is the base of Mbembe’s worlds-in-movement theory which focuses on the idea of African mobility and its interaction with the rest of the world (2007, 27).

Among the most common destinations chosen by the Africans who left Africa, there were, and still are, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Taking into account the New African Diaspora in the US, three different waves can be identified: the first one occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when a large number of promising young people from African countries started to migrate to the US to study abroad, and then went back to their home countries to form the new leading class of their country; the second wave is the one occurred between the 1980s and 1990s, when the number of African immigrants strongly increased thanks to some law reforms, like the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act[1] and the Refugee Act[2]; the third is the one that occurred after the 2000s when migration from Africa to the US increased again (Bordin 2020, 20).

It is important to point out that African immigrants in the United States have been frequently omitted in the discourses of race and ethnicity. One of the main causes is the idea that their number is too small compared to other immigrant populations and, as underlined by Benjamin A. Okonofua, “not much attention is paid to the increasing tensions and antagonism between African immigrants and African Americans” (2013, 1).

Racial discrimination is one of the most salient characteristics of American society: Blacks have always been relegated to a position of disadvantage compared to the Whites and to other ethnicities.

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[1] The law eliminated the national origins quota system, which had set limits on the numbers of individuals from any given nation who could immigrate to the United States. The act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on October 3, 1965, and took effect on June 30, 1968.

[2] The Refugee Act of 1980 created The Federal Refugee Resettlement Program to provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and to assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival in the United States.

According to Bordin, the presence of such a great number of Africans in the US had a great impact on the debate on blackness since the number of Africans that reached the US legally in the last decades has surpassed the number of the ones who were victims of the Black Atlantic trade. One of the main topics of discussion is the relationship between these two groups that share some peculiarities, like the color of their skin and the subsequent racism or the experience of exploitation by Europeans, but in the meantime they have so many different features. For example, Africans in the US experience increased social mobility than African Americans, as can be seen by their level and quality of education and by their average per capita income. This fact led to some tensions among the black American community caused by the fear that the success of African American people could diminish the debate on the role of systemic racism in the US and on the economic and social marginalization of Black people.

Even though the experience of colonialism suffered by African Americans has something in common with the institution of slavery, these people don't share with African-Americans the memory of slavery and the subsequent racial segregation and, for this reason, they don't feel race as a major aspect of their identity and they bring to the debate more shades of meaning to the idea of blackness, national identity, and civic memory by adding the possibility of diversity inside a phenotypic category (Bordin 2020, 2).

In addition, another source of conflict among African Americans and African immigrants in the U.S. is the different perception of ethnic identity. African immigrants believe that African Americans crave a sense of historical attachment to specific African cultural domains and that they are seemingly frustrated by the feeling of "rootlessness" as a result of which they increasingly come to despise and resent the African immigrants (Okonofua 2013, 6). In doing so African Americans experience a deep sense of frustration derived from their lack of African culture. While, on the other hand, African Americans see the construction of the African immigrant's identity as a sort of repudiation of blackness. What African Americans are not able to see is the effort that African immigrants do to find a compromise between their ethnic identity and their new "racialized" self in the U.S. (Okonofua, 2013,6).

It is important not to forget that African immigrants experience a lot of pressure in the U.S. in order to become American. This is due to the fact that the process of

acculturation mainly consists of the so-called “Americanization”, the process by which immigrants become naturalized and assimilated into mainstream American customs and values and become integrated into American society. This process typically involves learning the English language and adjusting to American culture.

Another main source of conflict among African-Americans and African immigrants is the access to the limited social and economic resources and opportunities available for black people in the U.S.: “resource contestation occurs along several dimensions including struggle for cultural, political, and economic resources” (Okonofua 2013, 8).

As already mentioned, a lot of African immigrants in the U.S. are highly educated and skilled young people who contribute to the American economic growth. Therefore, they fit perfectly the category of “strong diaspora” theorized by Cohen (2008). According to his theories. “strong diasporas” possess three key features: “(a) a strong identity; (b) an advantageous occupational profile; and (c) a passion for knowledge” (Cohen 2008, 149). When the author talks about strong identity he refers to the fact that these members of the diaspora have a definite ethnic or religious identity used for creative purpose; by “advantageous occupational profile” he means that these people are often more strongly represented in the professions, possess two passports, and are generally more wealthy; and when he talks about “passion of knowledge” he refers to the fact that these people show passion for education and possess various certifications: “degree certificates, vocational or professional qualifications are the passports of the successful members of a diaspora… A passion for knowledge is also adequately or even spectacularly served by intense curiosity” (Cohen, 2008, 150).

As Ede (2018, 37) points out, a close-reading of the production of African Diasporic authors during the Black Atlantic, approximately from the 18th to the early 20th century, shows that the themes explored by Phyllis Wheatley (1773), James Wheldon Johnson (1912) or Olaudah Equiano (1789) are very similar. They explored emancipatory themes, used appealing tones, and narrated about the loss of the African diaspora that in those eras was very much unempowered and lacked metropolitan agency. On the contrary, works like Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011), NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013), or Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) display a sharp differentiation in intergenerational African diasporic agency; in fact, these novels

"focalize characters who are socially empowered, confident, upwardly mobile, and relatively in control of their destinies" while the previous "dramatize the alienation, dispossession, graduated powerlessness and social marginalization of older African diasporas in the UK and in the USA as loci of Black presence outside of modern Africa." (Ede 2018, 39).

Among the above-mentioned authors, it is crucial to underline the importance of the production of the African Diasporic women writers. They give voice to a group of people who used to be at the margin of gender and race hierarchies and are now in charge of highlighting the complexities of relations in and out of national, cultural, religious, gender, and ideological bonds (Sterling 2017, 5).

1.3 Afropolitans and Afropolitanism

The term Afropolitan, as mentioned above a shorthand for African and cosmopolitan, was coined by the writer Taiye Selasi in her article "Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)" published in 2005 in the *LiP* magazine. Selasi used these words to refer to herself and to the new generation of African immigrants:

> They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. (Selasi 2005, 5)

According to Pucherova (2018, 407), Selasi's definition is remarkable because it has a deep focus on modernity, succession, sophistication, on worldliness and appears to be set out to destroy all negative images of Africa, in fact, "the Afropolitan is a successful, 21st century, nomadic metropolitan figure, imbued with social and, to some extent, political agency, is clearly at variance with the static, dispossessed and largely marginalized African diaspora of the slavery or abolition era, or of the pre-colonial, colonial and immediate postcolonial periods during a politically tumultuous 1960s" (Ede, 2018, 37).

Selasi talks about her generation as the new and promising African people who were raised by highly skilled African parents who left their countries for the West; they used to be deeply confused adolescents that had to forge a deep sense of self in a cultural hybrid environment and they are now at the forefront of trying to understand and complicate Africa, in fact, "Perhaps what most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique" (Selasi, 2005).

Their condition of being Africans means coming from a continent that is usually portrayed as problematic and their desire is to honor their roots and to talk about their cultural complexity; as a consequence, while the previous generation looked for traditional professions (like doctors, lawyers, bankers, engineers, and so on), on the contrary the new generations are becoming part of media, politics, venture, capital and design. Therefore, the Afropolitan subject, aware of the articulated African reality, is involved in the process of creating cultural bridges between the African continent and other countries usually located in the West (Gikandi 2011, 11).

The concept coined by Selasi was then theorized and enriched by the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe, who affirmed that the term could be used to rethink the idea of Africanness strictly related to the cosmopolitan 21st century society and also to describe an ethical position of being open to others by the virtue of occupying several cultural spaces (Mbembe 2007). As he explains in an interview with Sarah Balakrishnan: "Afropolitanism refers to a way—the many ways—in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart" since "historically, Africa has been defined in the Hegelian paradigm as out of history, as not belonging to the world" (Balakrishnan 2016, 29).

As Pucherova observes (2018, 407), Mbembe emphasizes Afropolitanism as an identity based not on exclusion or opposition but on being through others or relation; an identity whose allegiance is to the worldwide human community:

> The awareness of this imbrication of here and elsewhere, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, this relativization of roots and primary belongings and a way of embracing, fully cognizant of origins, the foreign, the strange and the distant, this capacity to recognize oneself in the face of another and to value the traces of the distance within the proximate, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with all manner of contradictions—it is this cultural sensibility, historical and aesthetic, that suggests the term Afropolitanism (Mbembe 2010, 229, trans. by Skinner, 2017, 10).[3]

1.4 The New African Diaspora and its Literary Production

In the middle of the 20th century, the commitment of emerging African writers to repudiate the distortions of African realities in fiction and memoirs written by European colonizers gave birth to the African novel written in European languages, mainly written in English and French, which can be categorized as a literature of political protest (Emenyonu 2020, 6).

As previously anticipated, according to Ede (2018, 37), if the production of African Diasporic authors during the Black Atlantic explored themes related to emancipation, a feeling of loss caused by African diaspora, and unempowered subjects who lacked metropolitan agency, the literary production of the novelists belonging to the generation of diasporic and Afropolitan subjects is more involved in the process of creating cultural bridges between the African continent and other Western countries (Gikandi 2011, 11). They tell stories of emancipation, about people who are more

[3] "La conscience de cette imbrication de l'ici et de l'ailleurs, la présence de l'ailleurs dans l'ici et viceversa, cette relativisation des racines et des appartenances primaires et cette manière d'embrasser, en toute connaissance de cause, l'étrange, l'étranger et le lointain, cette capacité de reconnaître sa face dans le visage de l'étranger et de valoriser les traces du lointain dans le proche, de domestiquer l'infamilier, de travailler avec ce qui a tout l'air des contraires - c'est cette sensibilité culturelle, historique et esthétique qu'indique bien le terme Afropilitanisme."

"socially empowered, confident and relatively in control of their destinies" (Ede 2018, 39) than their predecessors from the Old African Diaspora. In fact:

> African diasporic literature presents the Afropolitan as a progressively and relatively more empowered postmodern African-diasporic personality compared to his or her preceding New World and European Pan-Africanist predecessor. Afropolitans, being temporally and historically removed from harsher colonial/European and New World socio-political atmospheres, are the adult children of the colonial and postcolonial African émigrés of the twentieth century, who migrated to European 'mother' countries – mostly England and France, and latterly, to an erstwhile new Empire, America – due to educational, economic and other existential attractions. As such, a millennial identity shift has occurred due to a twenty first century Afropolitan transcendence which jettisons a negative Hegelian New World and European interpellation of Blackness in preceding centuries. (Ede 2018, 40)

Moreover, according to Simon Gikandi, Afropolitan writers can be described as a younger generation of Africans and scholars from Africa, "who are trying to question the idiom of Afro-Pessimism[4] and to recover alternative narratives of African identity of a hermeneutics of redemption" (2011, 10).

Among these authors it must be cited the famous "afropolitan" Taiye Selasi and Teju Cole, the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Zimbabwean NoViolet Bulawayo, the global-Igbo Chris Abani, the Ethiopians Dinaw Mengestu and Abraham Verghese and the emergents Lesley Nneka Arimah, Akwaeke Emezi, Yaa Gyasi, Imbolo Mbue e Chinelo Okparanta, among others (Bordin 2020, 22).

As Bordin affirms, these authors' literary production can be described as migrant, global, postcolonial or African American literature, since their works are highly transversal and comprehensible only through a transnational perspective. As the critic points out, all the above-mentioned authors have clearly tapped into the American

[4] According to the 2018 Oxford Bibliography entry on Afro-pessimism written by Patrice Douglass, Selamawit D. Terrefe, and Frank B. Wilderson III, Afro-pessimism can be understood as "a lens of interpretation that accounts for civil society"s dependence on anti-black violence—a regime of violence that positions black people as internal enemies of civil society".
https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190280024/obo-9780190280024-0056.xml

literary tradition for features concerning, for example, the setting and the style (Bordin 2020, 22).

One of the most important of these novelists is undoubtedly the Nigerian-American Chris Abani, author of *Graceland* (2004). Abani can be considered as the first author who introduces a gaze on the United States. The main character of his novel is Elvis Oke, whose mother named him in such a way after Elvis Presley; the teenager tries to escape Lagosian poverty by impersonating the famous singer and, after a series of events, migrates to the United States. As testified also by his later works, *The Virgin of Flames* (2007) and *The Sacred Story of Las Vegas* (2014), Abani shows a close relationship with American culture, which can be traced in his inspiration taken from American literary tradition and in the choice of the setting of his novels (Bordin 2020, 23). A similar approach can be noticed in the works of Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American writer, author of *Open City* published in 2011. The novel is set in New York and recalls the atmospheres of postmodernism and the Western figure of the flâneur (Bordin 2020, 23).

As underlined by Bordin (2020, 23-24), African American literature occupies a privileged position among the literary traditions that inspired most African American writers. The relationship among the people belonging to different groups of the Black Diaspora is not an easy one because, as anticipated in paragraph 1.2, even if African American and Black American people share their Blackness and a common origin from the African continent, they belong to different cultures and are not willing to be considered as the same thing. As a consequence, the authors of the New African Diaspora share mixed feelings towards American Blackness and its literary tradition as demonstrated by novels about the differences among these kinds of Blackness like *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007) by Ethiopian-American Dinaw Mengestu.

Among the contemporary African writers who craft fiction "about the ravages of hybridized existence in the borderless world of the twenty first century" (Emenyonu 2017, 213) there are, for example: Sefi Atta, author of the collection of short stories *News from Home* (2010) and the novel *A Bit of Difference* (2013); NoViolet Bulawayo, author of the novel *We need New Names* (2013); Ama Ata Aidoo, who wrote the collection of short stories titled *Diplomatic Pounds*; and Okey Ndimbe, author of *Foreign Gods Inc.* (2014). All the above mentioned works "comprise a genre of

literature that mirrors the transformative nature of African experiences in the global environment of today's world" (Emenyonu 2017, 213).

Besides, there are also literary works produced by Black metropolitan and migrant writers who could be considered as the embodiment of the Afropolitan spirit. Above all, Taiye Selasi, the author who coined the term "Afropolitan", in her *Ghana Must Go* (2013) creates a group of characters whose stories are marked by mixed ancestry, migration, exile, and gravitation between different worlds. Another iconic novel, published in 2013, is *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "a compelling work that uncovers the transformative aspects of diaspora life for African immigrants" (Emenyonu 2017, 215), in which the author analyzes and reshapes Blackness by using the point of view of the "outsider within", re-imagining racial solidarity between African immigrants of the "new" African diaspora and African Americans of the Old African Diaspora (Shane A. McCoy 2017, 1).

In the chapters that follow, I will highlight how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichiein *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi in *Ghana Must Go* explore all the issues related to Blackness, to diasporic identity and how they try to pacify the Black American and African-American's world. In fact, these novels reveal some important insights about the assimilation experiences of African immigrants and both allude to the fact that the phenomenon of transnationalism is intricately connected with the assimilation experiences of African immigrants.

2. *AMERICANAH* BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

2.1 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Her Life and Works

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is considered as "the leading and most engaging voice of her era, she has bridged gaps and introduced new motifs and narrative varieties that have energized contemporary African fiction since her first novel" (Emenyonu 2017, 1). She was born in Enugu in South-Eastern Nigeria, in 1977, and grew up in Nsukka where both her parents worked. She was a voracious reader from a young age and she fell very soon in love with Chinua Achebe's novel *Things fall Apart* (1958). She began to study medicine at the university of Nsukka but soon left for the United States, where she studied Communication and Political Science at the Eastern Connecticut State University. After her Bachelor degree, she received a Master's degree in creative writing from John Hopkins University and then studied African History at Yale University.

Her first published works, both produced in 1997, were a collection of poems titled *Decisions* followed by the play *For Love of Biafr*a that the author later dismissed as "an awfully melodramatic play". The play was the earliest work in which Adichie explored the Biafra war and was followed by several short stories on the conflict that later became the subject of *Half of Yellow Sun* (2006), one of her highly successful novels.

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003 and won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2005 for Best First Book (Africa). It is the coming-of-age story of Kambili, a 15 year old Nigerian girl, who lives in Enugu and whose family is wealthy and respected but who is terrified by her fanatically religious and overbearing father.

Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, winner of the Orange prize, was the result of many years of research and writing and was published in 2006; it was built on the experience of her parents during the Biafra war and vividly represents the savagery

of the conflict by focusing on the events occurred to a small group of middle-class Africans. The novel became an international best seller and also a movie.

The Thing Around Your Neck, a collection of short stories, was released in 2009 and was followed by *Americanah*, her most famous novel published in 2013; the latter is the story of the romantic and existential struggles of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman studying in the United States who has created a blog entitled “Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America”. Adichie is also author of some nonfiction works including the essay *We Should All be Feminist* (2014), adapted from a speech she gave at a TEDx talk two years before being published and that was also featured in Beyoncé’s song “Flawless” (2013). She has become very famous and she is considered as one of the most important African American writers. According to Ernest N. Emenyonu:

> She established herself as Africa pre-eminent storyteller who uses her tales to give meaning to the totality of the world as she perceives it, producing in effect, narratives that seek to shape a new world of understanding as they give expression to realities people know and human commitments and awareness they need to know (2017, 1).

Furthermore, “her commitment as a writer lies in her vision of the writer as a harbinger of social awareness, truth and empowerment; with responsibilities to educate as well as challenge human actions and reactions at a point in time” (Emenyonu 2017, 12). The inspiration of her art is situated in her Igbo heritage; in fact, her fiction is full of narrative forms, concepts of beauty and aesthetics and Igbo wit and wisdom. As pointed out by Emenyonu, Adichie’s vocation is the one of the artists in traditional Igbo society because she serves as an educator for the audience but she also covers the role of the entertainer, philosopher and counselor (Emenyonu 2017, 12).

With her literary production Adichie gives voice to a generation of young Black people who want to rewrite and reshape the image of Africa to avoid “the danger of a single story” (Adichie 2009).

2.2 Americanah

Adichie's third novel *Americanah* was published in 2013 by Alfred A. Knopf and in the same year was the winner of the 2013 U.S. National Books Critics Circle Award for fiction. It is one of the most outstanding example of postcolonial, and also, Afropolitan novel written by a woman who embodies the perfect example of a cosmopolitan, well educated, Black woman who writes to give voice to a generation of young Black people who are not victim of a forced diaspora but who choose to travel, to study abroad and to increase their social condition.

The title *Americanah* refers to a Nigerian vernacular expression used to refer to those who have lived in the United States and have acquired American affectations. The transnational dimension of the novel is displayed by its setting that, in fact, it takes place in three different countries: Nigeria, United States and United Kingdom.

The main characters of the novel are Ifemelu and her former boyfriend Obinze. Ifemelu, the daughter of a middle-class Igbo Nigerian family, leaves Nigeria to attend University in the United States; after moving she has to face a lot of difficulties, like adjusting in the new country in which she deals with both racist and sexist episodes and where she eventually becomes a citizen, wins a fellowship at Princeton and becomes the author of a successful blog about race. Against all expectations, she decides to come back to Nigeria and builds a life for herself there. Obinze Maduewesi, Ifemelu's first boyfriend, is the son of a professor and is really passionate about America. After graduation, he decides to leave Nigeria to find better career opportunities in the UK, but unfortunately, once there he faces a lot of economical and bureaucratic difficulties and ends up deported; he eventually becomes rich thanks to a real estate job in Nigeria.

The stories of Ifemelu and Obinze are juxtaposed throughout the novel: on one side Ifemelu lives stressful but productive years in America while Obinze lives a disastrous experience as an illegal in London. Both Ifemelu and Obinze face the complications of distance, displacement, and separation and, through their stories, Adichie presents us a full range of emotions and events related to migration.

The novel focuses also on other migration stories like the one of Aunt Uju. She is the closest of Ifemelu's relatives and she is a strong-willed doctor who happens to be the mistress of the General, a powerful man in the Nigerian government, and who is

forced to flee to the U.S. after his lover's death. Aunt Uju represents the point of view and the experience of the kind of migratory subjects who strongly want to be integrated in the new society in which they live. For this reason, she accepts to change the pronunciation of her name and she decides to talk to her son Dike only in English, giving up Igbo language.

The main reasons that drive Ifemelu and Obinze, as many other young Nigerians, to leave are the political and economic conditions of their country. As Dobrota Pucherova points out: As Obinze meditates, he left Nigeria even though he was not starving because he could not bear "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness" and was "hungry for choice and certainty", "conditioned from birth to look somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else" (Pucherova 2018, 411).

Nigeria, a former British colony, gained its independence in 1960 and became a Republic in 1963. During the following years, the young country was the scenario of different military coups and wars like the Biafra war, which ended in 1970 with the reincorporation of Biafra. After those years, Nigeria underwent an economic boom thanks to oil trade, in fact oil exportation was crucial for the growth of the economy. In the meanwhile, the government was affected by an impressive spread of corruption and an ineffective management of state funds and resources. Unfortunately, Nigeria was affected by other military coups and that brought to the civil administration of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The President was not able to manage the economic decline that followed the previous oil boom: corrupted politicians spent state money and funds irresponsibly and made Nigeria a debtor country. From 1980 to 1990 other military coups failed to find a solution to the situation of economic decline and ended with a regime ruled by General Sani Abacha. His government, which lasted until 1998, was a real tyranny characterized by a violent suppression of any form of dissent, violence and corruption. About one year after his death, in 1999, Nigeria returned to being a Republic with President Obasanjo, who tried to improve economic and political conditions of the country both on national and on international level which led to few improvements (Falola and Heaton 2008, xviii).

As mentioned above, neither Ifemelu nor Obinze are forced to leave their country but they decided to do it in order to find their path and to find better career

opportunities. Even if they don't have to face problems like forced displacement, slavery or subjugation, they have to deal with issues like assimilation, racism, lack of money and many others but they can and eventually choose to come back to their home.

In the following paragraphs, I will examine some of the main issues presented by Adichie in the novel. *Americanah* is a great example of a postcolonial novel in which the author deconstructs a world made of stereotypes about Africa and Black people. She gives a voice and a blog to a well-educated, young woman who works to raise awareness on the issues related to Blackness and on the subsequent assimilation of immigrant Black people affected by the loss of their ethnic identity.

In order to do it, Adichie uses a language characterized by a mix of English, Nigerian, American slang, colloquialism and Igbo words, and the tone is mainly ironic.

The first theme I focus on is Ifemelu's discovery of race in the U.S. and her subsequent criticism of mainstream America and white privilege. Then I will examine in depth the importance and the meaning of body related issues and particularly the meaning of Black hair in the novel and the effects that western ideals of beauty have on Black women. Lastly, I display how Ifemelu's blog is used as a means of dialogue between the Old and the New Diaspora; I also discuss how she employs it to explore postcolonial issues, like White privilege, by using the point of view of the "outsider within". It is, furthermore, shown how President Barack Obama represents a symbolic figure used to connect different generations of diasporic Black people.

2.3 "I only became black when I came to America"[5]

This section will focus on Ifemelu's discovery of race in the United States and its embedded position in American society. I will show how, using Ifemelu's blog, the author narrates how the issues of race and racism, class and white privilege intersect with one another and have a strong influence on American society and its structure.

As already mentioned, Ifemelu is the author of the blog *Raceteenth or Curious Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a*

[5] Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. London. 4th Estate. 2017, p. 290. From now on referred to as AM.

Non-American Black (AM 4) on the subject of Blackness. After a conversation on racialized beauty with her white boyfriend Curt, Ifemelu decides to write an e-mail to her friend Wambui in which she explains all the "things she didn't tell Curt, things unsaid and unfinished" (AM 295). Wambui suggests to her that "More people should read this" (AM 295) and that she "should start a blog" (AM 295).

As Ifemelu explains, before moving to the United States she had never thought of herself as Black because she "came from a country where race was not an issue" (AM 290). But, as she warns her non-American Black audience, "In America, You're Black, Baby"(AM 220). In fact, as Ifemelu experiences, all African immigrants arriving to the United States must deal with Blackness and, also if they have different cultural heritages and identities, it will be their "master status [...] their most salient social identity, in ways that are new, complex, and foreign" (Landry 2018, 127).

Since telling Wambui about her experience "was not satisfying enough"(AM 296) and since "she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others" (AM 296), Ifemelu opens a Wordpress account and starts blogging. Her aim is to express her critical insight on race in America and to show the perspective of a Black African immigrant that despite a shared race has a completely different experience from those of native Blacks. Considering that Africans distinguish themselves in terms of ethnicities and not for their skin color, she experiences the full range of problems that African immigrants in the U.S. have to face when dealing with the American's category of race. As Benjamin A. Okonofua (2013, 6) points out, this different vision is caused by the fact that American culture is composed of a great number of various cultures that underwent a massive cultural assimilation and that today are blended together through the process of Americanization. Cultural assimilation, far from promoting multiculturalism, encourages the standardization of immigrants in the U.S who desire to become American and, therefore, to shed their "otherness" (Okonofua 2013, 6). This process of Americanization is particularly insidious for African immigrants since it involves mainly "being white" to have access to a broad spectrum of possibilities and resources that are denied to black people. In addition, since they are not white, African immigrants are expected to be African Americans, who, because of their history of slavery, segregation and discrimination, are supposed to be a disadvantaged entity (Okonofua 2013, 7).

The category of race plays such a central role in the United States that Ifemelu is able to make a living by writing on this topic. It is important to bear in mind that the adjective Black in the U.S. has become a blanket term used to refer to all Black people regardless of their ethnicity or ancestry. In one of her blog's entries, Ifemelu shows her disappointment about this particular topic and she uses these words to warn her fellow Non-American Black:

> 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 Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation in the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up. And admit it- 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. Don't deny now. What if being black had all the privileges of being white? Would you still say "Don't call me black, I'm from Trinidad"? I didn't think so. (AM 220)

As a Black person, Ifemelu loses her identity and individuality no matter if she is African, not African American, and her cultural heritage and identity are much more complex than what mainstream America believes.

One of the other topics, closely linked to the importance of race, is the one of racial hierarchy in the United States. As Ifemelu writes in one of her blog's entries:

> There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvelous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're all right; if you're brown stick around; if you're black, get back!). (AM 184)

As a matter of fact, in racialized societies:

> superordinated races construct racial structures composed of relations, practices, and ideologies to create and maintain their differential possession of and access to material

> benefits. As a result, subordinated races experience reduced life chances and develop similar objective interests reflective of their positions in relation to the racial structure. (Landry 2018, 129).

Ifemelu has to face the fact that as a Black person she is supposed to share identity and cultural heritage with African Americans even though they have almost nothing in common except for their skin tone. Her individuality as an African immigrant fades into the background, because first of all, she is seen as a Black person. Yet, African immigrants like her do not want to be defined only as Blacks because in the U.S. they represent an underprivileged category and because this means being identified with the lowest class in American society. In addition, being considered only as Black causes problems related to cultural identity but also to socioeconomic achievement as well as issues related to racism and prejudices.

As regards racial hierarchies, Adichie repeatedly stresses that like Ifemelu, who immigrated to pursue higher education, Blacks of African ancestry differ from native Blacks because they are among the most educated immigrant group in the country, but still "Sometimes in America, Race is Class" (AM 166). In one of her blog's entries Ifemelu makes a complaint against the behavior of a carpet cleaner that she meets while babysitting in a rich white family house, she says that:

> It didn't matter to him how much money I had. As far as he was concerned I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America's public discourse "Blacks" as a whole are often lumped with "Poor Whites". Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. A curious thing indeed. (AM 166)

Ifemelu points out the problems related to social structure in the U.S. in different blog entries. In the one titled "What Academics Mean By White Privilege, or Yes it Sucks to Be Poor and White but Try Being Poor and Non-White" (AM) she offers a very hard perspective on the American hierarchical social structure:

> So this guy said to Professor Hunk, "White privilege is nonsense. How can I be privileged? I grew up fucking poor in West Virginia. I'm an Appalachian hick. My family is on welfare." Right. But privilege is always relative to something else. Now imagine

someone like him, as poor and as fucked up, and then make that person black. If both are caught for drug possession, say, the black guy is more likely to be sent to jail. Everything else the same except for race. Check the stats. The Appalachian hick guy is fucked up, which is not cool, but if he were black, he'd be fucked up plus. He also said to professor Hunk: Why must we always talk about race anyway? Can't we just be human beings? And Professor Hunk replied - that is exactly what white privilege is, that you can say that. Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't have that choice. The black guy on the street in New York doesn't want to think about race, until he tries to hail a cab, and he doesn't want to think about race when he's driving his Mercedes under the speed limit, until a cop pulls him over. So Appalachian hick guy doesn't have class privilege but he sure as hell has race privilege. (AM 346)

This passage shows how the intersection between class and race limitates Black people when it comes to social mobility. Their disadvantage with respect to White people is a matter of fact in America because in the ladder of social hierarchy even poor White people are higher than Black people. Since Whites, even when they are poor, can disregard race and claim colorblindness, they can at least maintain their white privilege. As Adichie states in this passage, White privilege is the power to negate racial inequality and to believe that the material success they enjoy is just the result of their individual hard work and investments in education and not of their privileged position in social hierarchy.

Moreover, as an African immigrant, Ifemelu is not able to understand some of the things that for African Americans represent an act of discrimination or are perceived as problems but as a Black person she is expected to understand and support her fellow Blacks and act just like them while, in the meantime, she is considered an outsider by some of the African Americans she met. Ifemelu warns her audience about what being Black means by suggesting to them how to deal with their Blackness. She writes:

So you're black, baby. And here's the deal with becoming black: You must show that you are offended when such words such as "watermelon" or "tar baby" are used in jokes, even if you don't know what the hell is being talked about- and since you are a Non-American Black, the chances are that you won't know. (In undergrad a white classmate asks if I like watermelon, I say yes, and another classmate says, Oh my God that is so racist, and I'm

> confused. Wait, how?). 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." (AM 220)

The blog entry continues with a list of acceptable behaviors to bear in mind during conversations about Black women, about the appropriate voice tone to use and about the proper conduct to have when dealing with racist episodes:

> In describing black women you admire, always use the word "STRONG" because that is what black women are supposed to be in America. If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY. And if you are a man, be hypermellow, never get too excited, or somebody will worry that you're about to pull a gun. When you watch television and hear that a "racist slur" was used, you must immediately become offended. Even though you are thinking "But why won't they tell me exactly what was said?" Even though you would like to be able to decide for yourself how offended to be, or whether to be offended at all, you must nevertheless be very offended. When a crime is reported, pray that it was not committed by a black person, and if it turns out to have been committed by a black person, stay well away from the crime area for weeks, or you might be stopped for fitting the profile. (AM 220)

Ifemelu's post proceeds with other tips useful to be socially accepted by White people. She goes on suggesting to pay attention to other fellow Blacks behavior and to compensate for their misconduct, to take into account whether their interlocutor is a White liberal or a conservative person when telling them a racist episode that happened to them. She writes:

> If a black cashier gives poor service to the nonblack person in front of you, compliment that person's shoes or something, to make up for the bad service, because you're just as guilty for the cashier's crime. If you are in an Ivy League college, and a Young Republican tells you that you got in only because of Affirmative Action, do not whip out your perfect grades from high school. Instead, gently point out that the biggest beneficiaries of Affirmative Action are white women. If you go to eat in a restaurant, please tip generously. Otherwise the next black person who comes in will get awful

> service, because waiters groan when they get a black table. You see, black people have a gene that makes them not tip, so please overpower that gene. If you're telling a non-black person about something racist that happened to you, make sure you're not bitter. Don't complain. Be forgiving. If possible, make it funny. Most of all, do not be angry. Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism. Otherwise you get no sympathy. This applies only for white liberals, by the way. Don't even bother telling a white conservative about anything racist that happened to you. Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion. (AM 221)

Since she is considered an outsider she is often accused of being part of a privileged group. For example, during Professor Moore's history seminar after, the vision of some scenes of the film *Roots,* one of the student asks why the word Nigger was beeped. The conversation about the different perception of the N-word by Black natives and African Immigrants ends with an African American girl saying " Well if you all hadn't sold us, we wouldn't be talking about any of these" (AM 138) making clear that they belong to opposite factions. Also Shan, Blaine's sister, who is African American, during a party states that Ifemelu is an outsider by saying:

> You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?...Because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she'd be just labeled angry and shunned." (AM 336)

By using these words, Shan makes clear that she does not consider Ifemelu as an equal because she doesn't value skin color as a representation of a shared culture or ethnicity. Through Shan's voice, Adichie highlights the internal divisions inside the Black community. In fact, as mentioned in paragraph 1.4, while mainstream America considers her African American, African Americans do not see her as part of their community.

Bearing in mind that White people think that "slavery was so long ago" and are not willing to listen to African Americans because they accuse them to be resentful for the atrocities experienced by their ancestors during enslavement and segregation, it is

important to underline that since African immigrants lack this kind of anger, because they didn't experience all that pain, they can benefit of the chance to be heard.

Adichie uses Ifemelu's experience as a racialized immigrant in the United States to describe and to point out all the complexities and the paradoxes of the racial discourse. As a matter of fact, both African Americans and African immigrants are constantly subjected to ideas and expectations that society has of them and this inevitably plays a role in the construction of their identity.

One of the things that the author underlines is that White people pretend that race doesn't exist and are not willing to listen complaints about it unless the discourse is "so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn't read between the lines won't even know it's about race" (AM 336), or as an alternative, she suggests to "find a white writer. White writers can be blunt about race and get all activists because their anger isn't threatening" (AM 336). Through Ifemelu's voice, Adichie also highlights that "Americans are most uncomfortable with race" (AM 350) and explains that it's almost impossible to discuss something racial because the Americans will probably say that "It's simplistic to say it's race, racism is complex" (AM 351) and by that they "just want you to shut up already" (AM 351).

For all the reasons mentioned above, according to Landry (2018, 128), African immigrants struggle between their ethnic identities and their new post-migration racial identities; this process is fundamental "to the development of a racial consciousness in that African immigrants must learn how to navigate the white social world and multiple Black worlds, those of both African Americans and foreign blacks". Through this process, African immigrants do the cultural and social work of expanding what Blackness means in the American context and contribute to reshape Black identity in the United States; this is clearly shown in *Americanah,* in which the description of the difficulties and intricacies of social life provide great material to the process of meaning-making regarding ethnicity, race, identity, and acculturation.

2.4 “Black Women’s hair is political”[6]

In 2013, during an interview for the British Network Channel 4, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie made a very strong statement by saying that “Black Women’s hair is political”. She said that:

> It’s a political thing. [...] Black women’s hair is political. [...] By walking in somewhere with my hair like this, people make assumptions, immediate assumptions. If my hair isn’t straight, people can assume that you’re either – you know, they might think that you’re an angry black woman, or they might think you’re very soulful, or they might think you’re an artist, or they might think you’re vegetarian. [...] I’m just interested in hair as a means of talking about other things: what society tells us is beautiful. Because you look at women’s magazines and these things matter. And we look at what's on television and what, sort of, the larger society says is beautiful. It’s straight hair. And so, you have young girls who are growing up with that in their heads and it’s something that I want to talk about.[7]

In *Americanah*, Adichie uses hair as a metaphor for race in the U.S. in order to express what it means for Ifemelu to be Black, and how this experience of Blackness influences her process of self-knowledge and identity construction.

As it will be discussed, body-related issues play a central role in the construction of the diasporic identity and they are often related with traumatic events that determine the alienation of the diasporic subjects. In particular, Adichie uses hair-related issues to explore Ifemelu’s awareness about her ethnic identity and her subjectivity. As a matter of fact, Ifemelu learns of all the complications related to Black hair only when she arrives in America; here she will go through a journey of self-discovery in which all her hairstyles assume a social meaning: she wears box braid when she lands in the U.S but she will wear soon chemical straightened hair when trying to conform to white American society; then she wear her natural hair when she will learn to her accept her Blackness; eventually she braids her hair again when she will return to Nigeria. Each

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[6] These are the words pronounced by Adichie during an interview for the British network Channel 4 News. It can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ck2o34DS64.

[7] Ibid.

hairstyle is a representation of a specific mindset of our protagonist and each is a different step in the construction of her identity.

In this paragraph, after a brief introduction on the meaning and importance of hair in African cultures, I will examine why and to what extent hair is a major issue for Black Women, as displayed also by Ifemelu's experiences, and how racialized beauty ideals affect them negatively.

I will base my discourse mainly on the article by Tabora A. Johnson and Teiahsha Bankhead "Hair It Is: Examining the Experiences of Black Women with Natural Hair" (2014) based on a research conducted on 529 Black women exploring their experiences wearing their hair in its natural state; on Yolanda Chapman's thesis "'I am Not my Hair! Or am I?': Black Women's Transformative Experience in their Self Perceptions of Abroad and at Home"(2007); and on Cristina Cruz-Gutierrez's contribution to the *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* (Emenyonu 2020) titled "'Hairitage' Matters: Transitioning & the Third Wave Hair Movement in 'Hair', 'Imitation' & *Americanah*".

As Johnson and Bankhead affirm:

> For Black women and girls, identity is inextricably linked to their relationship to and presentation of their hair. Hair is important in many cultures and its meaning and symbolism vary depending on social and cultural context. For African people, hair is deeply symbolic, and its meaning extends into multiple dimensions of Black culture and life. (2014, 86)

It is important to notice that throughout history hair has maintained a spiritual, social, cultural and aesthetic significance in the life of African people who have often used hair as a means to carry messages; as a matter of fact, it was, and it still is, used as a marker of different cultural indications such as age, religion, social rank, marital status as well as other status symbols. For example, young Wolof girls used to partially shave their hair to mean that they were not of marrying age. In addition, hair was and still is used to increase the potency of medicine and healing potions. In light of this, it is clear how the process of shaving the heads of enslaved people was a symbolic removal of African culture and a strong act of dehumanization. As Johnson and Bankhead explain:

> Europeans, who had long traded and communicated with Africans, knew the complexity and significance of Black hair. They were often struck by the various hairstyles that they saw within each community. In an effort to dehumanize and break the African spirit, Europeans shaved the heads of enslaved Africans upon arrival to the Americas. This was not merely a random act, but rather a symbolic removal of African culture.
> The shaving of the hair represented a removal of any trace of African identity and further acted to dehumanize Africans coming to the Americas in bondage. African with cultural identities such as Wolof, Asantes, Fulanis, and Mandingos entered the slave ships, yet an enslaved unidentifiable people exited onto the shores of the Americas. Without their combs, oils and native hair recipes Africans were left unable to care for an essential part of themselves. Europeans deemed African hair unattractive and did not consider it to be hair at all; for them it was considered the fur of animals and was referred to as wool or wooly. (2014, 87-88)

What emerges is that after centuries of enslavement, persecution and oppression, African beauty, body and hair have been, and still are, racialized, while European features became the accepted standard of beauty. Thus, Africans began to believe that lighter skin and straighter hair would have helped them reach social and economic well-being.

The oppression of Black hair is obviously related to the oppression and enslavement of Africans and it is the main cause of the flourishing increase of hair care and beauty product lines intended to lighten darker skin and straighten ‘nappy’ hair. One of the main things that caused this desire to look as white as possible was the preferred treatment of biracial Blacks who had better life conditions, used to work less and occupy less physically demanding positions. For these reasons, when at the end of the 19th century the hair-straightening comb was invented to tame Black hair it gained a huge success as the well-known story of Madam C.J. Walker[8] demonstrates. Although she has been criticized for perpetuating the idea that straight hair leads to social and economic advancement, she was among the first Black women to offer a medium to

[8] Madame C.J. Walker was the first African American entrepreneur. She is recorded as the first female self-made millionaire. Walker made her fortune by developing and marketing a line of cosmetics and hair care products for Black women.

reach social acceptance in a period in which they were subject to discrimination and mocked for the texture of their hair.

During the 1960s and 1970s, after centuries of segregation and oppression, a new wave of Civil Rights and racial pride for Black people in the United States started to grow. This movement encouraged people to wear hair in its natural state and, as a result, the Afro hairstyle became symbolic of political change.

As a matter of fact, for many women of African descent "hair is emotive, symbolic and an inseparable part of their identity" (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 88) and it plays a strategic and important role emphasized also by mothers and grandmothers who deliver the message that "your hair is your crown and glory" (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 88). As a consequence, many Black women are not comfortable when their hair is not done and they spend a lot of money, energy and time to be always well-groomed. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Black hair care industry gathers over half a trillion dollars annually. It is also important to point out that

> In the Western world, Black identity has been constructed to normalize whiteness. Thus, society deems Blacks and other people of color as the "other". While hair is significant to Black women, hair is a part of every woman's identity to some degree. Hair is a distinct "marker of womanness, gender and identity". Because of this "othering" of Blackness, which includes Black hair, Black women have historically been seen as inhuman objects. Black women's femininity, body, and physical features have been under attack since the capturing of Africans who were removed from their homelands with force and disregard for their humanity. Hair is particularly meaningful to women of African descent because it has been "displayed as beautiful and decadent and used to display culture, beauty and spirituality". This traumatizing phenomenon coupled with its socio-cultural, historic, and spiritual relevance has resulted in a hyper-awareness of hair for Black men and women, but in particular Black women and girls. (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89)

Moreover, Black people are led to believe that hairstyle is an indicator of a person socioeconomic status and it is not a coincidence that a lot of Black women used, and still use, to straighten their hair while many others "denounced hot combing and chemical relaxing hair straightening methods, since these practices were perceived to

emulate European beauty standards” (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89). Today, there is an increasing number of college-educated, modern, young Black women, aged between 20 and 35, who decide to transition from using chemicals to straighten their hair to wearing their hair naturally to indicate their character and personality while in mainstream society European physical attributes have been, and still are, considered as the standard of beauty. This standard has caused a neat distinction between opposite attributes “to distinguish African features from European features such as kinky and straight, long and short, dark and light, good and bad” (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89). In addition:

> These beliefs have seeped deep into the psyche of many communities of color. Particularly in African communities throughout the Diaspora, to have “good hair,” or a “good nose” means that one’s hair is closer in texture to that of people of European descent or that the nose is straight and resembles that of a European ideal. Beauty has been socially and politically constructed to emulate those in power, White people. (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89)

In *Americanah*, Adichie gives particular attention to the process of transition and rediscovery of natural Afro hair through Ifemelu’s experience and gradual acceptance of her natural hair. As illustrated by the authors mentioned above in this paragraph, it is common that Black Women refuse their natural hair and are more inclined to wear long and straight extensions, to undergo chemical straightening treatments or to wear straight wigs.

In light of the importance of hair related issues, it is no coincidence that the novel opens with a hair-related scene; the scene opens on Ifemelu taking a train to reach a hair salon because “it was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton – the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids” (AM 3). At this point of her life, Ifemelu is a successful blogger, she has decided to go back to Nigeria and she is very aware about herself and her identity. She chooses her hairstyle and the color of the extensions even if Mariama, the hairdresser, tries to convince her to choose something else and shows disapproval on

her decision to avoid the relaxer for her hair. Ifemelu says that "I love my hair the way God made it" (AM 12) showing a big self-awareness and a great confidence. Her awareness is the result of a very long and complex path through the many difficulties related to culturally related standards of beauty. As the narrative continues, Ifemelu often restyles her hair according to the situations she has to face and this is the reason why, even if at the beginning she was not aware of the social and cultural implications of hair, it plays a central role in her growth and self-perception.

It is important to point out that during Ifemelu's life hair has always had a central role, even though during her adolescence it is not related to race, identity and self-awareness. This importance can be traced in the words used to describe her mother's hair, which is called a "crown of glory" (AM 41) and described as "black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the saloon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration" (AM 41). Ifemelu was so fascinated that she "would often look in the mirror and pull at her own hair, separate the coils, will it to become like her mother's, but it remained bristly and grew reluctantly; braiders said it cut them like a knife" (AM 41). As a young girl she has a true devotion to her mother's hair that can be traced in the choice of the words used to describe it, such as: crown, glory, reverently, objects of faith. That's why she not only wants to look like her mother but she realizes to be different. Her mother's hair is also an expression of beauty and femininity which, as soon as she joins a radical Catholic group, is perceived as offensive and evil and thus rigorously removed. From that moment on, Ifemelu change attitude towards her mother: it seems that she is not able to recognize her anymore and to abandon her as a role model. She feels that her mother has changed and that she avoids "relaxing hair" because it "offended Him" (AM 42).

Another episode that shows Ifemelu's attitude towards hair is related to Aunt Uju. She accompanies her aunt to a hair salon in Lagos and she thinks about the cost of the relaxer retouching treatment that she is having:

> The haughty hairdresser sized up each customer, eyes swinging from head to shoes, to decide how much attention she was worth. With Aunty Uju, they hovered and grovelled, curtsying deeply as they greeted her, overpraising her handbag and shoes. It was here, at a

> Lagos salon, that the different ranks of imperial femaleness were best understood. [...] Aunty Uju laughed and patted the silky hair extensions that fell to her shoulder: Chinese weave-on, the latest version, shiny and straight as straight could be: it never tangled. (AM 77)

Here the use of the adjective "imperial" is a reference to the patriarchal mechanisms related to both gender and race that impose Western ideals of beauty on women. Since women are often considered only as men's gadgets, whose only role is to adapt to their aesthetic standards, African women recurrently refuse to wear their natural Afro hair.

When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, hair acquires a completely different meaning and role. As Aunt Uju warns her when she suggests to her to "make small small braids that will last long" (AM 100), the first thing that she has to face is the fact that haircare is much more expensive. For this reason she decides to braid her hair with long extensions and to wear each style for more than three months even if her scalp will itch and the braids will sprout fuzzily from a bed of new growth (AM 203).

Besides these practical issues, what impressed Ifemelu the most were the social and racial implications related to different hairstyles that were, undoubtedly, invisible to her when she lived in Nigeria. For example, Ifemelu was incredulous when Aunt Uju's main concern for a job interview to become a family physician was about her braided hair because she thought that "If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (AM 119).

Although she was initially surprised by her aunt's behavior and she thought that she "deliberately left behind something of herself" (AM 119) she will follow the same relaxer ritual before getting interviewed for a job. In fact, when she tells Ruth about the job interview that she has to take, she suggests "lose the braids and straighten your hair" because "nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters" (AM 202). And by this time Ifemelu realizes that even if during the past she has laughed at Aunt Uju, after some time in America she "knew enough not to laugh" (AM 203) anymore. All things considered, it emerges that both Aunt Uju and Ifemelu relax their hair before their job interviews in America because diasporic subjects like them try to adapt not only to patriarchal gender structures but also to the Western social patterns that consider natural or braided Black hair or Afro hairstyle untidy and unprofessional.

Ifemelu explores the theme of hair also in one of her blog's entries in which she portrays Michelle Obama as an example of Black woman who has adapted to American standards of beauty. As she underlines, Michelle Obama's public appearance always shows her wearing straight hair. Right after, she asks her audience: "So it's me or is that the perfect metaphor for race in America right there? (AM 297). She continues by saying:

> Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of wooly hair, or tight spiral curls… She would totally rock but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote. (AM 297)

If Aunt Uju seems to submit to the American standard of beauty without questioning herself and her identity; on the contrary, Ifemelu chooses to join the American way of thinking but she seems disappointed and uncomfortable with her new hairstyle. As it is appears in the following passage:

> Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss. (AM 203)

Her frustration is visible even to the hairdresser, who tries to cheer her up by saying "Look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing" (AM 203), referring to White-female hair as the standard to aspire. The sense of loss described in the passage above symbolize that she is aware of the fact that she is denying herself and an important part of her own identity but she feels that this is the price to pay to gain social inclusion, and particularly to be recognized as professional in her new job environment, because in America "professional means straight" (AM 252).

Unfortunately, what emerges is that the beauty myth of the good/bad hair dichotomy is alive and well and nowadays straight hair still symbolizes the good and

the most desirable option while curly or kinky[9] hair is seen as a manifestation of inferiority. As light color skin is still perceived as a social capital, hair perception is very similar for Black women.

Adichie chooses to show us two different perspectives on this particular issue through the conversation among Ifemelu and her American White boyfriend Curt. In fact, since Curt is not able to understand why she decided to change her hairstyle and to give up on braids, she explains him that:

> My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky. (AM 204)

When Curt understands the reasons that led her to relax her hair, he realizes how hair-link stereotypes are unfair and frustrating for those who suffer them. It should be noted that when Ifemelu is forced to cut her hair she feels weak and deprived of her beauty and femininity; she is not only concerned about Curt's reaction but she also feels very uncomfortable.

As anticipated before, Black women who wear natural or short hair are supposed to carry a social or political message; for example, when Ifemelu is forced to cut her hair short, because the chemical straightener has burned her scalp and her hair, she is asked whether this drastic gesture was linked to political reasons or to the fact that she was a lesbian (AM 211). As stressed out also by Johnson and Bankhead:

> To wear natural Black hair is a political act within itself, since depending on the environment such hair may be deemed socially and politically unacceptable. In 2007, *Glamour* magazine editor, Ashley Baker, gave a presentation entitled "The do's and don'ts of Corporate Fashion," to over 40 lawyers in New York City. The first "don't" slide depicted a Black woman with an Afro, with the caption "say no to the fro". She then

[9] It is no coincidence that the definition of the word kinky on the Oxford Dictionary is:
"1(*informal*) (*usually disapproving*) used to describe sexual behavior that most people would consider strange or unusual. 2 tightly curled or twisted: *kinky hair.*"
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/kinky

> commented, "As for dreadlocks: How truly dreadful!" She went on to add that it was "shocking" that some people still think it "appropriate" to wear those hairstyles at the office. "No offense", she sniffed, but those 'political' hairstyles really have to go". These statements are clear indications of structural racism and offer an indictment on Black women's beauty, and mere physical characteristics. After all, is it really a choice if people are routinely criticized for simply wearing their hair as it naturally grows from their scalp? It is also evidence of race privilege—a White woman has the authority to define what is considered beautiful and what is not. There is also then an assumption that others must also hold these same beliefs to be truths and cooperate with White hegemony. One of the issues is that this form of structural racism has economic, social, and political consequences for Black women. (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89)

Moreover, as Yolanda Michele Chapman (2007) illustrates, Black women are affected by both racial and gender oppression, the so-called "othering", as their hair is politicized and racialized by both class and gender. Chapman investigates how African and European cultural influences affect African American ideas about beauty, hair and identity. One of the major issues experienced by the participants of her survey is the "othering of their hair" (Chapman 2007, 68) that is perceived as a manifestation of who they are; their identity is, thus, the object of other's interpretation about who they are based on how their hair appears. The result showed that Black women in a corporate setting are supposed to follow the standard of dress, speech and behavior normed on Whiteness. For example, since the Afro is considered as a symbol of resistance towards White supremacy and it is seen as unacceptable in the corporate environment some women were invited to "get rid of her vibrant red Afro" (Chapman 2007, 68) while another was told that it was "too out there and it should be neater" (Chapman 2007, 68). Another significant episode quoted by Chapman in her survey was the one occurred in the United States at a corporate presentation about work fashion:

> The women lawyers group at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton invited an editor or employee from *Glamour* magazine to make a presentation on "the do's and don'ts of corporate fashion". The first slide of "don'ts" on the powerpoint was a Black woman with an afro. She stated "As for dreadlocks: How truly dreadful! The style maven said it was "shocking" that some people still think it "appropriate" to wear those hairstyles at the

> office. "No offense", she sniffed, but those "political hairstyles really have to go". This woman called natural black hair a "Glamour Don't". (Chapman 2007, 70)

All things considered, it can be affirmed that "This example is yet another example of the structural racism and symbolic violence that is inflicted on Black women through their hairstyle choices" (Chapman 2007, 70).

Surprisingly, short and natural hair will drive Ifemelu through a journey towards self-love and awareness about her identity. In fact, she begins to accept her natural beauty also with the help of a web-community called HappilyKinkyNappy.com (AM 212) in which Black people share beauty hair-care tips, beauty advices and it also gathers shared experiences about racism in beauty magazines and in everyday life.

As an African woman, Ifemelu was not aware of all the racist issues that she has to face in the United States. Her relationship with her hair symbolizes a journey towards self-love that culminates in an episode in which she refers to her hair using the adjective "glorious", that was first used to describe her mother's hair, when she realizes "that simply, she fell in love with her hair" (AM 213).

In conclusion, her hair-related journey is used as a metaphor to symbolize an experience of self-development which implies the subject's ability to control his/her own identity in a conscious way, without being ruled by patriarchal structures of gender and race. Thus, Black hair has been and continues to be symbolic of both power relations and resistance (Johnson and Bankhead 2014, 89) as demonstrated by Ifemelu's experience.

2.5 "More people should read this. You should start a blog"[10]

As already said in the previous paragraphs, Ifemelu is the author of the blog *Raceteenth or Curious Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* (AM 4), whose main subject is Blackness in America seen by the eyes of an African immigrant.

As Adichie affirmed on the "International Author's Stage" in 2014, she decided to make her character a blogger because she "wanted this novel to also be social

[10] AM 366.

commentary", but she "wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction".[11]

In this section I discuss how Adichie uses Ifemelu's blog as a means of dialogue between the Old and the New Diaspora; I will also discuss how she employs it to explore several postcolonial issues, like White privilege, by using the point of view of the "outsider within". It will be, furthermore, shown how President Barack Obama represents a symbolic figure used to connect different generations of diasporic Black people.

Before going deeper into the subjects anticipated above, it is necessary to make a premise on postcolonial writing. It refers to the writing and to the culture of those countries who were once colonized by Europeans. In fact, postcolonialism[12] "refers to the wider, multifaceted effects of colonial rules" (Hiddleston 2009, 1) and, since the exclusion of the subaltern from his own history mirrors his economic and political subjugation, one of the main concerns of postcolonial writers is to unveil the horrors of colonialism and its impacts on the social, cultural and political level of the colonized countries; as a consequence, its literary production can be defined as a response to the portrayal of the colonized made by the colonizers.

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), there is a certain tendency to group together several kinds of postcolonial literature under the label "Black Writing". In fact, writers in the African Diaspora are often grouped taking into account the fact that they talk about race as a major feature of economic and political discrimination but ignoring their nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The other major issue that is often ignored is that there is a substantial difference between texts written by "a Black minority in a rich and powerful White country and those produced by the Black majority population of an independent nation"

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[11] The interview is available on *YouTube* at the following address : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8r-dP9NqX8 .

[12] As Hiddleston explains: "The term postcolonialism is a highly ambiguous one. In order to understand its meanings and implications it is first necessary to define the colonialism to which it evidently refers. Colonialism should be conceived as the conquest and subsequent control of another country, and involves both the subjugation of that country's native people and the administration of its government, economy and production. The act of colonization is a concrete process of invasion and a practical seizing of control. [...] The colonial projects involves the literal process of entering into a foreign territory and assuming control of its society and industry, and, on a more conceptual level, the *post facto* promulgation of a cultural ideology that justifies the colonizer's presence on the basis of his superior knowledge and "civilization"" (2009, 1).

(Ashcroft et al. 2002, 19); as a matter of fact, the production of the first group often stigmatizes Blacks with deteriorating stereotypes while the latter is meant to write back to show how White people continue to be full of prejudices.

To fully understand the position of these writers, it could be useful to reflect on the position of hegemony covered by Europe and its culture. In fact, as Edward Said pointed out in his *Orientalism* (1978), as long as the discourse on the Orient[13] is based on the representation made by Western people with their ideologies and beliefs, the Orient will always be perceived as subaltern. This position of subordination is also the cause of the loss of these subalterns' voice; in fact, as Gayatri C. Spivak affirms in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), the power structure of colonialism doesn't allow them to speak and among these voiceless subjects the worst position is occupied by women who are oppressed by the power structure of the society, by the colonizer and by the patriarchy.

In *Americanah*, in order to express her point of view on race related issues, Adichie adopts the point of view of the "outsider within" (McCoy 2017). Ifemelu, in fact, covers a position that allows her to act "as a lens for reading and interpreting history, society and culture; she occupies "the position of cultural outsider to cultural insider and allows many Black female intellectuals [to make] creative use of their marginality – their 'outsider within' status – to produce Black feminist thought that reflects a special standpoint on self, family, and society" (McCoy 2017, 280). According to Shane A. McCoy, Ifemelu's blog is a means to re-imagine racial solidarity between African immigrants and African Americans and "to disrupt the assumptions and expectations of Western readers, in general, and American readers, in particular" (McCoy 2017, 281).

It is important to underline that at the beginning of her career as a blogger, Ifemelu choses anonymity. During the first decade of the 21th century, the years in which she wrote *Raceteenth*, anonymous writing online was very common. This fact allows her to portray the society she is living in without filters, without being judged, and it also allows her to start a conversation with her audience. She often narrates

[13] Said uses the word *Orient* to signify a system of representation framed by political forces that brought the *Orient* or the East into Western Empire, Western learning, and Western consciousness. The West uses the word in its relation to the East. It is a mirror image of the inferior, the alien (*Other*) to the *West*.

everyday episodes related to race but she doesn't "want to explain" (AM 386); she wants "to observe"(AM 386) and asks her audience to express their points of view to start a conversation among all those who suffer or experience similar things. This happens, for example, when she asks her audience "How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America? How many had felt as though their world was wrapped in gauze?" (AM 366). The choice of the pseudonyms *Non American Black* reflects her intentions to build a kind of kinship around unspoken discussions, and to offer her audience a safe place to talk about them. In fact, as M.J. Gibeault affirms:

> By speaking through an organizing category, the possibly plural non American black, Ifemelu undermines forces that seek to diminish her and makes room for multiplication. Instead of choosing a concrete, singular pseudonym, her moniker suggests and encourages a collective, and her writing often ends with an encouragement for participation (via interaction and comments). Through adopting the voice of a non-American Black, Ifemelu empowers herself and others who respond, contend, and eventually, elevate her voice. *Americanah* is a novel that depicts how the web, because it was built for a community where hierarchy was not an important concern, is a natural fit for social justice uses. (2019, 43-44).

According to Serena Guarracino, "Through the more and more persistent presence of blog entries in the novel, *Americanah* describes the main character's coming to writing – not to creative writing, though, but to blogging as a hybrid form that brings together storytelling, reportage, and emotional value" (2014, 14). Therefore, the role of the blogger is somehow related to the one of the writer and highlights all the differences that put the blogger in the position to be able to express feelings and experiences and to be the voice that transmit all the social commentary through writing about real life while the writer is the one who can only do it through fiction.

Ifemelu's career as a blogger soon becomes a great opportunity and a real job: she gains thousands of readers and she even has a PayPal account for donation, for example. What is more, it gives her a lot of visibility and the opportunity to express her opinion in public. As Shan underlines, she is somehow privileged because she has the chance to

write “that blog” only “Because she’s African. She’s writing from the outside. She doesn’t really feel all the stuff she’s writing about. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she’d just be labeled angry and shunned” (AM 336). Moreover, as Shan explains shortly before, as a Black American women she has not the chance to write about the same issues:

> You can’t write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write about how people are really affected by race, it’ll be too *obvious*. Black writers who do literary fiction in this country, not the ten thousand who write those bullshit ghetto books with the bright covers, have two choices: they can do precious or they can do pretentious. When you do neither, nobody knows what to do with you. So if you’re going to write about race, you have to make sure it’s so lyrical and subtle that the reader who doesn’t read between the lines won’t even know it’s about race. (AM 335-336)

If on one hand Ifemelu is perceived as “Other” by African Americans, as Shan’s words demonstrate, on the other hand White American people see no differences between her and Black American people. As already pointed out in the previous paragraphs, Ifemelu’s experiences reflect how her identity is perceived in the U.S. and, as she reminds her non-American Black audience, “when you make the choice to come to America you become Black. Stop arguing” (AM 184). As pointed out before, becoming Black does not only mean to be part of a racialized minority but also being perceived as the last of a social hierarchy, because “American Black is always at the bottom” (AM 184) and “Sometimes in America, Race is class” (AM 167). Unsurprisingly, as soon as her blog acquires success, Ifemelu starts to be criticized for her blog entries. Some accuse her of being the real racist while others tell her that she should be grateful that they even let her into the U.S. (AM 307). On the other hand, as Blaine tells her: “Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they’re reading you as cultural commentary. That’s a real responsibility” (AM386).

Thus, the blog became a place to open a discussion among people with different stories and origins, among those who are the descendants of the Old Diaspora and the people of the New one, as a place to underline how alive and well White privilege is. Ifemelu “embodies the emergence of a new ‘buffer’ class of well-educated black

immigrants to the US who are, in part, defined against African Americans" (Chude-Sokei 2014, 56). As a matter of fact, although she is often mistaken as African American, she still experiences the common assumptions of African immigrants, including questioning her ability to speak English (AM 134-135), being subject to American students' assumptions on "How bad is AIDS in your country?" (AM 140) or about how sad it is that "people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa" (AM 140), or the difficulty when it comes to learning how to navigate the differences between the Black Student Union and the African Students Association (AM 141).

Throughout the novel there are some significant episodes that show the ignorance of liberal white Americans when it comes to race related issues and that portray a society affected by unaware systemic racism. Among the characters who embody the good-intentioned white liberalist there are Curt, Ifemelu's rich white boyfriend, and Kelsey, the white woman that Ifemelu met at the braiding salon. While the first is unable to understand his privilege as a heterosexual white male from an upper class family, the latter portrays the liberal American stereotype of an enlightened, well-traveled, and eager to participate in the "exotic" and unfamiliar (McCoy 2017, 287). One of the most relevant episodes involving Curt is related to the representation of Black people and it occurs when he tells Ifemelu that *Essence*, a magazine that she reads, is "racially skewed" because it portrays only Black women (AM 294). This consideration drives Ifemelu to bring him to the nearest bookstore to investigate the presence of Black skinned women on the covers of magazines, and to show him how mainstream beauty magazines still excludes dark skinned women. As it could be predictable, the results show only the presence of "three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark" (AM 295). As a consequence, Ifemelu continues by saying:

> Not one of them looks like me, so I can't get clues for make-up from these magazines. Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for colour because all their readers are supposed to have cheeks you can pinch for colour. This tells you about the different hair products for *everyone* – and "everyone" means blondes, brunettes and redheads. I am none of those. And this tells you about the best conditioner – for straight, wavy and curly.

> No kinky. See what they mean by curly? My hair could never do that. This tells you about matching your eye colour and eyeshadow – blue, green and hazel eyes. But my eyes are black so I can't know what shadow works for me. This says that this pink lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink. Oh, look, here is some progress. An advertisement for foundation, There are seven different shades for white skin and one generic chocolate shade, but that is progress. Do you see why a magazine like *Essence* even exists? (AM 295)

The importance of this episode is underlined also by the fact that later that afternoon, Ifemelu writes an email to her friend Wambui to give voice to her huge disappointment and to the feeling that Curt's inability to understand "the implicit biases, microaggressions, and everyday acts of institutionalized white racism that negate the existence of black people" (McCoy 2017, 284). The second example related to white privilege is the one involving Kelsey, the white woman at the African hair-braiding salon. She tells Ifemelu that she is about to visit Africa and is reading some books to prepare herself for her adventure. She tells Ifemelu that even though everybody recommended *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe, 1958) she prefers *A Bend in the River* (Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul, 1979) because it was the "most honest book" (AM 190) she has ever read about Africa and the one that made her "truly understand modern Africa" (AM 189). At this point, Ifemelu leans back on her seat and, using moderate tones, says:

> She did not think the novel was about Africa at all. It was about Europe, about the battered self-image of an Indian man born in Africa, who felt so wounded, so diminished, by not having been born European, a member of a race which he had elevated for their ability to create, that he turned his imagined personal insufficiencies into an impatient contempt for Africa; in his knowing haughty attitude to the African, he could become, even if only fleetingly, a European. (AM 190)

To that, Kelsey replies: "Oh, well, I see why you would read the novel like that" (AM 190), implying that "she was miraculously neutral in how she reads books while other people read them emotionally" (AM 190). These two episodes involving Curt and

Kelsey are useful to understand how Ifemelu's "outsider within" perspective acts as a "competing reality to liberal White Americans who may harbor "good intentions" but fail to consider the ways in which sociocultural conditioning by educational institutions have influenced their perspectives about Black cultural production" (McCoy 2017, 285).

Another issue that must be taken into account is the one of racial solidarity with American Blacks and the role covered by the figure of ex-president Barack Obama. He, in fact, represents a symbol of pacification among the different generations involved in the Old and New African Diaspora. As Blaine says in the novel:

> It's not because he's black, it's because he's a different kind of black [...] If Obama didn't have a white mother and wasn't raised by white grandparents and didn't have Kenya and Indonesia and Hawaii and all of the stories that make him somehow a bit like everyone, if he was just a plain black guy from Georgia, it would be different. America will have made real progress when an ordinary black guy from Georgia becomes president, a black guy who got a C average in college. (AM 357)

Blaine's speech remarks the role covered by President Obama who is perceived as the "exceptional" and "magic" Black man who can transcend race (Chude-Sokei 2007). He also inspires Ifemelu's blog post titled "Obama Can Win Only If He Remains the Magic Negro" (AM 321). In this entry she says how Obama embodies a certain role. He is, in fact:

> the black man who is eternally wise and kind. He never reacts under great suffering, never gets angry, is never threatening. He always forgives all kinds of racist shit. He teaches the white person how to break down the sad but understandable prejudice in his heart. You see this man in many films. And Obama is straight from central casting. (AM 321)

As Louis Chude-Sokei explains in his article "Redefining Black" published on the *Los Angeles Times* in 2007:

> ALTHOUGH NOT quite able to pass for white, Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) has been able to pass for African American. He is biracial, but not white; black, but not African American; American but not African. What has entranced the country more than his somewhat vague policies is Obama's challenge to conventional racial and cultural categories. Among African Americans, discussions about his racial identity typically vacillate between the ideologically charged options of "black" versus "not black enough" or between "black" and "black, but not like us." But there is a third side to Obama — and also to the politics of racial passing in America. (2007)

He adds that, in a society in which the constant growth of the population of African immigrants, who don't racially and culturally define themselves as African American and perceive their culture "as alien and as hostile as mainstream America" (Chude-Sokei 2007), Obama represents a set of tensions that go beyond black and white. In fact:

> On one hand, there is America's complex and still unresolved relationship with African Americans and, on the other, an emergent black immigrant presence that is less willing to politically or socially pass for "black" and that has unresolved and unspoken issues of its own. In Obama, we witness how one set of tensions works with and against the other. Immigrant status is deployed not against race but against the messy and unresolved tensions of domestic American racial relationships. And in this, whether he wins or loses, Obama is definitely a sign of the country's future. (Chude-Sokei 2007)

In the light of all the above mentioned reasons, according to Shane A. McCoy, it can be affirmed that Ifemelu's blog post suggests that Obama's success is in part due to the fact that he is considered "as a hybrid figure shuttling between the Old diaspora and the New one, as his character combines the characteristics of the "Old" African Diaspora while also maintaining a foothold in the "New" African Diaspora" (McCoy 2013, 289). He represents a kind of bridge that is able to merge two different, and often hostile, sides.

The contribution of the novel is crucial in showing how assumptions and prejudices are not the right tools to use to understand and to discover the complex multicultural and transnational societies of our century; as widely discussed, race and

Blackness are still central topics to face when dealing with the African diasporas but they have acquired a lot of new shades of meaning as demonstrated by *Americanah*'s counter-narratives.

3. TAIYE SELASI’S *GHANA MUST GO*

3.1 Taiye Selasi: Her Life and Works

Taiye Selasi is a writer and photographer. She was born in 1980 in London and raised in Brookline, Massachusetts. She is the elder of twin daughters and her parents are from Nigeria and Ghana. Her father is a doctor from Ghana but lives in Saudi Arabia, while her mother, also a doctor, lives in Ghana. She graduated summa cum laude in American Studies from Yale and then she earned her MPhil in International Relations from Nuffield College, Oxford. Her name means first twin in Yoruba, her mother’s native tongue. She has changed her surname several times; she was given her mother’s surname, then she changed it into her stepfather’s one and when she met her father, at the age of 12, she changed it again. She eventually changed it again to Selasi, a word from the Ewe language meaning “answered prayer” or “God has heard”.

In 2005 *The LIP Magazine* published her famous article “Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)”, in which, as mentioned in section 1.3, Selasi describes herself and the new generation of African immigrants. In 2006, while studying at Oxford, she met Toni Morrison who gave her a one-year deadline to produce her first novel; after this event she wrote her debut short story *The Sex Lives of African Girls*. The story was published by the magazine *Granta* in 2011 and appears in *Best American Short Stories 2012.* It tells the story of Edem, an eleven-year-old girl rescued by her uncle when she was eight and brought to live with his wealthy family in Accra; the story takes place during Christmas day and tells how Edem begins to see and experience sex. She discovers that for all the women gravitating around this rich Ghanaian household sex is always associated to abuse and humiliation and inevitably starts at an early age with close relatives as initiators.

In 2013, her novel *Ghana Must Go* was published by Penguin Press and was selected as one of the best 10 books of 2013 by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist*. The novel follows the Sai family as they come to terms with the death of Kweku Sai, a surgeon and father of four, and as they work through their family troubles.

During the same year, Selasi was a juror in the Italian literary reality show *Masterpiece,* whose winner had the opportunity to publish his first novel with the publishing house Bompiani. Selasi is also one the authors of the documentary on global migration *Exodus, where I come from is disappearing*; it was released in 2017 and it is about the intimate stories of a group of people from different parts of the world whom the troupe followed for two years. In 2019, she contributed to the anthology *New Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Writing by Women of African Descent* edited by Margaret Busby.

3.2 *Ghana Must Go*

Ghana Must Go is Taiye Selasi's debut novel, published in 2013 by Penguin Press. The novel follows the Sai family as they face their father's death and as they deal with several family troubles. Selasi's first novel can be labeled as a literary representation of the identity and roots of the Afropolitans, those people who belong to no single geography (Crawley 2018, 128). Through the stories of the migrant heart-surgeon Kweku Sai and his wife Fola, as well as their children, all born in the United States, "the novel explores the desires, means, and consequences of being free from categorizations like nationalism, free to build homes and identities in multiple places while striving to connect them together" (Crawley 2018, 128).

The title refers to the bag used by Ghanaians when they were expelled from Nigeria. From the late 1960 to the culminating events of 1983, between one and two million Ghanaians were deported and the situation worsened under the government of civilian president Shehu Shagari. These events, colloquially known as the "Ghana must go policy", had major economic and political effects in both countries. Nigeria experienced an oil boom around 1958, it peaked around 1974 when crude prices went through the roof but soon enough they went dramatically down in the 1980s. In this context, Shagari campaign against foreigners was very successful; since he believed Ghanaians were taking over Nigerian jobs, he promoted the reappropriation of the Nigerian land from the influx of outsiders who were making profit out of it, while locals were struggling because of the worsening economy. After being given short notice to

leave Nigeria, a huge number of immigrants crammed their things into big plastic tote bags named after these events.

The novel opens with the omniscient narration of the death of the Ghanaian surgeon Kweku Sai. The man is dying in his house in Ghana, in which he lives with his second wife Ama. Although he has left behind his family, his first wife Fola and their four children are left to deal with the consequences of his death. The novel is set mainly in Boston, but the protagonist moves also towards Nigeria and Ghana. It portrays the intergenerational Afrodiasporic Sai family characterized by their perpetual navigation of the "shadowy gap between worlds" (GMG 221).

Kweku's first wife Folasadé is in Ghana when she learns of her ex-husband's death and, since her family is scattered in different places, asks her eldest son Olu to reunite them for the funeral; in fact, Olu lives in Boston with his fiancé Ling, Taiwo lives in New York and her twin brother Kehinde is supposed to live in London while Sadie, the youngest, is in school at Yale.

Taking a step back in time, the author presents the story of Kweku and Folasadé. They migrated to the United States of America in search of better education and career opportunities: Kweku wanted to become a surgeon while Fola was in law school. In the USA they have four children: Olukayodé the firstborn son, the twins Taiwo and Kehinde and Folasadé, called Sadie, the last born.

At that time, Kweku Sai was a renowned heart surgeon who worked hard to give his family the best opportunities, while his wife was a housewife who contributed to the income of the family by selling flowers. The misfortune of the family began when Kweku was unfairly dismissed from work because a wealthy patient died in his operating room and his family refused to accept his death. Kweku struggled to resign this dismissal and pretended for a long period that nothing had happened but, one day, Kehinde came to the hospital unannounced and witnessed his father was being thrown out by the security guards. The shame and frustration caused by this event brings Kweku to abandon his family and to return to Ghana to start afresh. Fola is left alone with the responsibility of raising four children by herself, which she apparently does very successfully: Olu becomes a medical doctor, Kehinde is a famous artist while his twin sister is the editor of a legal magazine and Sadie is a student at Yale. But though the children are academically brilliant, they struggle with various emotional problems.

Once in Ghana, after some initial struggles, Kweku remarries and starts his own practice. Also Fola moves back to Ghana, but only after all the children leave her house. Years later, when Kweku dies of cardiac arrest, the family is reunited again in Ghana for his funeral.

The plot of the novel shows various autobiographical elements. As already mentioned, Selasi is the one who coined the term Afropolitan to define herself and her fellow highly-educated and successful people with origins in Africa who are "not citizens, but Africans, of the world" (Selasi 2005, 528) and who feel home as the shifting place where "their parents are from; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live this year)" (Selasi 2005, 528). Furthermore, Selasi describes this generation of Africans as "lost in transnation" because they have to negotiate their identities along national, racial, and cultural tensions (Selasi 2005, 530).

As the author tells in an interview for *ES Magazines*[14] the first one hundred pages of the novel are inspired by a family reunion with her father, his ex-wife, and her five London-born nieces and nephews, and the ex-wife's new husband in India. Selasi remembers that they became a family despite the sense of strange-ness between them. As she affirms: "We had space in our hearts to love each other, space left vacant by previous departures, some inborn sense of how to build a family from 'found' love". As learned by other interviews and by her biography, themes like the lives of the twins, the divorces, the abandoning father, the academic success of the children of immigrant African families, the family-reunion and the migrations are all inspired by her own experiences.

In the following sections I examine some of the most frequent themes of immigrant fiction, such as the ones of dislocation and movement which are part of Fola's and Kweku's migratory experiences. I talk about their feeling of homelessness and their infinite quest for home and I show how in the novel "roots and routes merge" (Wallinger 2018, 207) in this search. Consequently, I show how the diasporic experience of the Sai has a great impact on the personality of their four children and how their experiences influence their life choices. Taking into account the anxiety

[14] The interview is available at the following URL: https://www.standard.co.uk/esmagazine/family-matters-how-novelist-taiye-selasi-came-to-terms-with-her-very-modern-family-8560426.html.

associated with the negotiation of identitarian roots and the intersectional interactions between race, ethnicity, gender, class and age, I display how Selasi crafts the diasporic identity of two generations of characters and how their trip to Ghana marks a turning point for all of them.

3.3 "We were immigrants, immigrants leave"[15]

The Sai family's members, all through the novel, move and relocate between Nigeria, Ghana, the United States and Ghana again. As such, they are an example of "the essence of migration", which is "about dislocation and the potential alienation of the individual from both old norms and new contexts" (White 1995, 6).

The plot of the novel rotates around movement, both in terms of movement between places and in terms of movement of feelings, of searching for something and searching for home. All the members of the Sai family are involved in these movements: some of them immigrate, others force themselves into exile or to other forms of abandonment, but all of them need to re-negotiate the old norms of home, family, nation and culture. To justify the frequent relocation of her family, Fola Sai, in an imagined conversation with her recently dead ex-husband, tries to explain Kweku's abandonment by saying "we were immigrants, we leave" (GMG 316). She refers to the fact that when things go wrong, they are only able to leave and search for better life conditions, as she did when she left Nigeria for the war and then Ghana. According to Wallinger, "Selasi's discourse about migration comes in text passages in the novel where the narrative voice moves from mirroring the perspective of one of the family members into that of a more general voice writing and theorizing about migration. Selasi not only tells a story but also uses terms and concepts from the wide field of immigration/migration studies" (2019, 207).

Ghana Must Go contains some of the features of the immigrant genre described by Rosemary Marangoly George (1996): it is both a very personal and partly autobiographical novel about a family's migration and it is also a partly didactic lesson about what this migration means in historical and contemporary contexts. As George

[15] Selasi, Taiye. *Ghana Must Go*. London. Penguin UK, 2013, p. 316. From now on referred to as GMG.

says in her *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*:

> It could be argued that the contemporary literary writing in which the politics and experience of location (or rather of "dislocation") are the central narratives should be called the "Immigrant Genre". Distinct from other postcolonial literary writing and even from the literature of exile, it is closely related to the two. For the immigrant genre, like the social phenomenon from which it takes its name, is born of a history of global colonialism and is therefore a participant in decolonizing discourse. (1996, 171)

She continues by underlining the fact that it is marked by a disregard for national schemes, by the use of a multigenerational cast of characters and a narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes, for example plots that involve several generations. But, above all, there is often a reference to the baggage metaphor and to homelessness.

In fact, a nearly obsessive quest for home dominates *Ghana Must Go*; for example when Kweku sees himself and Fola as "orphans, escapees, at large in world history, both hailing from countries last great in the eighteenth century—but prideful (braver, hopeful) and brimful and broke—so very desperately seeking home and adventure, finding both" (GMG 91). Both have suffered and have lived troubled childhood: Kweku was abandoned by his father, while Fola's mother died during childbirth and her father was killed during the war. The act of not sharing, not talking, not telling about one's shame or loss or fear is one of the costs of forced migration and a typical feature in immigrant novels.

The text shows a melancholic mood and has a nostalgic tone that emphasize the "aching, with longing, for *lineage*" (GMG 251) and for existential legitimation; according to Aretha Phiri, each family member is characterized by a self- destructive behavior that "undermines the Afropolitan feeling of being at home in the world replacing it with an elusive and fragile reality of being fundamentally un-homed" (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 41). The concept of homelessness was introduced by Homi K. Bhaba in his *The location of culture* (2004) in which he describes it as the feeling "of being caught between two clashing cultures".

Fola is an example of all these feelings: she has Yoruba and Scottish ancestors, she is a refugee who escaped persecution, and she suffers for her country's conditions. She is, furthermore, traumatized by the murder of her father, occurred during the Nigerian war in 1996, and her the following relocation in Accra, where her father's partner sent her to study. Here she was unhappy, "seldom speaking, barely eating" (GMG 201) and she remembers Nigeria as "not home, not a place she could see, so not real" (GMG 201). Nigeria is both the nightmare of her past and at the same time the place where she spent a happy childhood. As Wallinger points out, "It is not the act of leaving itself but the loss of a sense of home and belonging, the many questions left unanswered and unexplained, that lead to devastating and long-lasting effects" (2019, 211).

As time goes by her habit of seldom speaking leads to a silence that is going to be one of the main characteristics of her life; in fact, even if she lies next to her husband, "alive in the present and dead to the past" (GMG 197) she never tells him where she came from, he never talks about his own parents, and together they try to "uphold their shared right to stay silent" (GMG 197). When Fola leaves Accra to fly to the United States and attend Lincoln University, she is already homeless.

As regards her husband, Kweku, he was born in Ghana in a village named Kokrobité; his childhood was not a particularly happy one as he grew up without a father, who had left his family; then he suffered the loss of his sister Ekua, who died of tuberculosis at the age of 11. Thanks to his intelligence he won a scholarship that allows him to escape poverty. He is the gifted student who was given a chance to get his education in the United States; once there, he marries, he becomes the father of four children and a successful surgeon. He starts his own family and, if at the beginning they can only afford a small house, he will soon after be able to buy a colonial house in Boston. But soon enough he experiences failure, he loses his job and he is not able to accept it. He is covered in shame and the only thing that he can do is to run away, as his own father did.

The Sai family is the embodied stereotype of the immigrant family: Kweku provides the family income while Fola is a housewife and their children are brilliant at school. But "Then the machine turned against him, charged, swallowed him whole, mashed him up, and spat him out of some spout in the back" (GMG 69).

Kweku and Fola are somehow wanderers who are constantly searching for home and when they realize that home is not the United States, they move again and continue their quest.

As a consequence of their background and of their personal histories, the four children of Kweku and Fola follow in the footsteps of their parents. Their experiences are closely linked to the homelessness of their parents caused by their search for better education, career opportunities and better life conditions and are a consequence of their restlessness. The children's movements appear very similar to the ones of young Americans from the East Coast (they first attended high school in Boston, then they move to the East Coast for College and two of them went to study in Europe), but their geographical movements are followed by what Selasi calls, "the true movement, the true sense of mobility, I think you feel like this family is swirling; I think that comes from what's happening within" (Furlonge 2013, 539).

Olu, born Olukayodé, becomes a successful doctor and follows his father's footsteps. He is the one who suffers the most his father's absence and on the day of his graduation at Yale he flies to Africa because he has the urge to see him; he has long suffered the rootlessness of his family, he knows nothing about his own ancestors and every time he visits a friend he is attracted by the family portraits in their homes "aching with longing, for lineage, for a sense of having descended from faces in frames" (GMG 251). To him "that his family was thin in the backbench was troubling; it seems to suggest they were faking it false. A legitimate family would have photos on the staircase. At the very least grandparents whose first names he knew" (GMG 251). Olu remembers that he had always tried to spot his father in the crowd, and he thought it was easy to find him because "he could always pick out Kweku in an instant by his color" (GMG 247) but when he arrives in Accra he realized that "they were all the same color, more or less, all the fathers, his own blended in, indiscrete, of a piece" (GMG 247). When he finds Kweku, he notices that his father is living in a condition of exile, "cut off from the family" (GMG 253), in "a prison of his own making" (GMG 253), and realizes his suffering even if he does not understand his behavior; the apartment in which he lives is miserable and stinks of urine, as he explains his son "when one rents in Ghana, one has to pay twelve months upfront" (GMG 251) and tells him that is what he comes from (GMG 253), referring to the poverty of his childhood.

When Olu tells Ling, his fiancé, about his visit to his father, he says that Kweku was "that man. He was the stereotype. The African dad who walks out on his kids. The way that I'd always hoped no one would see us" (GMG 305); only after his death he realizes that "the man came from nothing; he struggled, I *know*. I *want* to be proud of him. Of all he accomplished. I know he accomplished so much. But I can't. I hate him from living in that dirty apartment. I hate him for being that African man. I hate him for hurting my mother, for leaving, for dying, I hate him for dying alone" (GMG 306). When he is finally able to understand the struggles faced by Kweku during his whole life, he is finally free to start a family of his own; until that moment he has lived in a sterile apartment with Ling and was not inclined to become a father.

The twins Taiwo and Kehinde, after Kweku's abandonment, are sent to Lagos where they live with Fola's half-brother. When Fola realizes that she is not able to ensure her children an education because she lacks money, she asks for her half-brother's help. But her brother "refused to send cash and proposed her a small trade as an alternative solution: if Fola would send her *ibeji*[16] to him, we would pay all their school fees plus college tuition" (GMG 237) because he explained "Having *ibeji* in the household might cure this wife Niké" (GMG 237), who is supposed to be infertile, because "*ibeji* were magic" (GMG 237).

There the twins have to face several traumatic experiences that will destroy their innocence and self-esteem. Femi, Fola's half-brother, who was never claimed as a son by her father, has always hated her; this hatred was mainly caused by the fact that she was the light-colored princess daughter of his father's first half-white wife, while he was just his black son and, for the most, the son of a mistress. At Uncle Femi's house, the twins are victims of sexual abuse and they are even forced to commit sexual acts upon each other. In a certain way, they are punished for the sins of their parents.

[16] According to a Yoruba myth, "*Ibeji* (twins) are two halves of one spirit, a spirit too massive to fit in one body, and liminal beings, half human, half deity, to be honored, even worshipped accordingly. The second twin specifically – the changeling and the trickster, less fascinated by the affairs of the world than the first – comes to earth with great reluctance and remains with greater effort, homesick for the spiritual realms. On the eve of their birth into physical bodies, this skeptical second twin says to the first "Go out and see if the world is good. If it's good, stay there. If it's not, come back". The first twin Taiyewo (from the Yoruba *to aiye wo,* to see and taste the world ,shortened Taiye o Taiwo) obediently leaves the womb on his reconnaissance mission and likes the world enough to remain. Kehinde (from the Yoruba *kehin de*, to arrive next), on noting that his other half hasn't returned, sets out at his leisure to join his Taiyewo, deigning to assume human form. The Yoruba thus consider Kehinde the elder: born second, but wiser" (GMG 84).

Luckily, one of Fola's friend recognize them and save them from these abuses. They are eventually saved and sent home by Fola's friend who "Just saw them there huddled up, children among adults, and knew who they were and that something was wrong; they were both wearing makeup and spoke as if drugged" (237). They return "too skinny, not speaking" (238) and when Fola asks them about their experience, they refuse to speak about it.

Uncle Femi punishes Taiwo because he relates her to the pale, hateful beauty of his father's first wife. Even Taiwo recognizes that the face of her grandmother in the picture on the wall of Uncle Femi's living room is her own. Just like Olu, the twins have no idea of their parents' background and their families' histories. When they arrive at Uncle Femi's house, they see the portrait of a light skinned woman who was very similar to Taiwo. Femi explained to them that "that woman" was their grandmother, Kayo Savage's wife and Fola's mother, and described their family tree with anger and bloodshot eyes saying "Somayina his wife. Folasadé his daughter. Babafemi his bastard. Olabimbo his whore" (GMG 173).

Of course, Taiwo develops negative feelings towards her appearance because she understands that her beauty, her skin complexion, her body and all the features she inherited from her grandmother are the reason why she becomes Femi's victim. Due to this traumatic experience, Taiwo develops negative feelings towards her mother; in fact, she blames her for sending her away as she also blames her father for abandoning her. She feels rage and her life is full of insomnia, emptiness, sorrow and grief. At a certain point she starts to think about dropping law school and earning some money waiting tables to buy a ticket to Accra because she needs to tell her father that he was "too weak to protect her" (GMG 208). When Olu calls her to tell her about their father's death, she is in a taxi and she stops to think of the place she would like to be in at that moment and she realizes that she has no place in which she feels like home (GMG 141) and concludes by saying that "there is her family, all over, in shambles, down one. Where would she go? There is nowhere (GMG 141).

Kehinde has always had a deep connection with his sister: he was able to hear her voice in his head and to know her thoughts. After the Lagos events, Kehinde cannot stop feeling guilty for not being able to protect his sister from their uncle's abuses. Inevitably, their relationship changes. After a painful conversation about Taiwo's love

affair (GMG 177-178), they stop talking to each other. Taiwo is not able to reach Kehinde even when she learns that he attempted suicide; on the other side, Kehinde spends his time painting his sister's face obsessively, he is not able to build a relationship with a woman and he often changes city and country because he doesn't feel at home anywhere.

The youngest of the Sai, named Folasadé like her mother and called Sadie, was very young when her father abandoned the family. She is not even able to remember him properly and she grows up very attached to her mother. Sadie struggles with eating disorders and she has always felt as an outsider in her own family. In this regard, there was a game she used to play with herself as a child, the game "guess how many seconds it will take them to notice that someone's gone missing, that Sadie's not there?" (GMG 144); usually Olu was the one who noticed her absence, even though she hoped to receive her sister's attention. She has a very low opinion of her family and she often compares it to her best friend Philae's family, the Negropontes. Actually she would like to be part of her family and she envies "their picture along the wall along the stairs" (GMG 146) because Philae's family is "heavy, a solid thing, weighted" (GMG 146) while hers is "light, diffuse" (GMG 146). She thinks that:

> It isn't only that her family is poorer by contrast that makes Sadie cling to the Negropontes as she does. It is that they are weightless, the Sais, scattered fivesome, a family without gravity, completely unbound. With nothing as heavy as money beneath them, all pulling them down to the same piece of earth, a vertical axis, no roots spreading out to underneath them, with no living grandparent, no history, a horizontal – they've floated, have scattered, drifting outward, or inward, barely noticing when someone has slipped off the grid. (GMG 146-147)

In *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi gives voice to people like her that she defines as "wondering" and "wandering" (Furlonge 2013, 533). There are some recurring elements that symbolize this obsessive search for home and for roots. Through the loss of their father, they are forced to come to terms with their own histories and identities. According to Wallinger, the author writes about "the break-up and reunion of a family and explains

the individual family members' trials and triumphs to the reader with the ulterior motive of making one family's story stand in for many others" (Wallinger 2019, 217).

While in this section I have presented the Sais' trauma and their background, in the following one I will show how, through their trip to Ghana, they come to terms with their own identities and are finally able to find their home.

3.4 "We've been scattered enough"[17]

As introduced in the previous section, one of the main motifs of the novel is movement, both a geographical one and an inner one. Through these movements the author describes the Sais' quest for home. As such, as Wallinger affirms, the novel is an "existentialist examination of a family's attempt to become and remain a family and to build up and live in a home of their own" (2018, 208). The novel is not linear nor chronological and it is no coincidence that the three sections that constitute it are titled using a verb of movement, to go. They are named: *Gone*, *Going* and *Go*. Every section constitutes a stop in the Sais' journey to find themselves and their home.

The first section, *Gone*, opens with a barefoot dying Kweku. His slippers, as a symbol of home, are "by the doorway to the bedroom" (GMG 3) and he is considering whether to go back and get them. He is a brilliant heart surgeon and he knows the symptoms of a heart attack, but instead of doing something to save himself, he wonders for his house until he arrives in the garden; there, on the threshold, he admires his garden and the statue of the *iya-ibeji*, the mother of twins, which was a gift for her ex-wife Fola. The house in which Kweku is living was conceived to host his family, to be the nest of the Sais, to be a means to make amends for his abandonment. There are even Kweku and Fola initials carved at the entrance. In this section, the author presents the characters of the novel and presents some recurring images that link them to each other and to the places they live, as for example the slippers that will recur in Taiwo memories about his drunk father lying on the sofa after he was fired and on the last scene of the novel.

The second section, *Going*, opens with the news of Kweku's death. Fola receives a phone call from Benson, a family friend, and she informs her children. In this section,

[17] GMG 314.

Selasi narrates the personal stories of the Sais, illustrated in the previous section, starting from the moment in which each of them comes to know about the death of their father and the subsequent trip to Ghana.

As Selasi affirmed in an interview with Nicole Brittingham Furlonge, Kweku fits the stereotypical immigrant character who leaves home for education and she adds that:

> This is the classic immigrant movement, and I would call that *going*. That's *going* to America to get an education. And then they stay. They stay in America for a very very long time. And I think what happens after, for both of them is that they *leave* America. Kweku *leaves* America because he's undone by shame, and Fola *leaves* America because she no longer sees a reason to stay. And goes back to Ghana, and Fola, the same. That is what I would say in terms of leaving and going. (Furlonge 2013, 535)

The third section, *Go*, is about the Sais staying in Ghana to attend Kweku's funeral and about the process of dealing with their personal demons. This trip to Ghana reverses what Yogita Goyal terms the "Heart of Darkness narrative", the one in which "rather than Europeans or North Americans going to Africa to find themselves, an African character travels to the heart of the West, only to find darkness there" (2014, xii). In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow travels to Africa on a commercial mission but he returns embittered, with a growing contempt of the civilized world and with a new awareness of himself; while in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, while in the United States, Kweku has to face the racism of his patient's family, Fola has to deal with her husband abandonment, their children have to live without a parent and with all the traumas related to this event. Only through this last trip to Ghana, all the members of the family are able to find some peace after moving beyond traumas; in fact, "the journey for them is one of discovery, about their father and their own heritage, both encapsulated in this place from which they were entirely cut off in their North American upbringing" (Crawley 2018, 131).Though born in the United States, the four Sai children, as sons and daughters of immigrants, often feel out of place; they perceive their family as "an improbable picture" (GMG 39).

Olu has always been the model son, the one who followed his father's footsteps and became a doctor because "that was the dream, Sai and Sons, family business"

(GMG 242). He always felt to be just like his father and he was proud of it, but then he was particularly troubled by his abandonment; he is disoriented and decides to go to Ghana and find him on the day of his own graduation. Once in Ghana, his father tells him that he can't do what he did, he tells him that he "Can't give up when you're hurt. Please. You get that from me. That's what I do, what I've done. But you're different. You're different from me, son" (GMG 252). This feeling is accentuated also by his fiancé's father who accuses Olu of being just another African man. Dr Wei pronounces a long racist speech full of stereotypes against Africa and African men:

> You know, I never understood the dysfunctions of Africa. The greed of the leaders, disease, civil war. Still dying of malaria in the twenty-first century, still hacking and raping, cutting genitals off? Young children and nuns slitting throats with machetes, those girls in the Congo, this thing in Sudan? As a young man in China, I assumed it was ignorance. Intellectual incapacity, inferiority perhaps. Needless to say I was wrong, as I've noted. When I came here I saw I was wrong. Fair enough. But the backwardness persists even now, and why is that? When African men are so bright, as we've said. And the women, too, don't get me wrong, I'm not sexist. But why is that place still so backward? I ask. And you know what I think? No respect for the family. The fathers don't honor their children or wives. The Olu I knew, Oluwalekun Abayomi? Had two bastard children plus three by the wife. A brain without equal but no moral backbone. That's why you have the child soldier, the rape. How can you value another man's daughter, or son, when you don't value your own? (GMG 119-120)

Ling's father continues by asking him about his mother's name: she is Ms. Savage and not Mrs. Sai, so it is clear that his father has abandoned her; following his reasoning about African men, Olu will probably abandon Ling too.

When in Ghana, Olu deals with the sorrow of his family and feels the pain of loss; this makes him realize that he doesn't want to lose Ling and that he loves her. Finally, he is able to explain his feelings: he feels shame for his father but he is also proud of him, he suffers for the prejudices and he has always measured his gesture and feelings because he was afraid of losing control, he acted like he did not care about his roots but he has always felt the urgence to explain that he was smart even though he came from

Africa. He tells Ling that he wants “to do better” (GMG 306) and when they make love he feels “so home” (GMG 307).

Taiwo, throughout the novel, shows her discomfort for never having “felt what she saw in those windows, that warm-yellow-glowinginsideness of home” (GMG 123) that she sees in other houses. She owns a house but she says it is a “house-not-a-home” (GMG 141). Even when her father was with them, she has always thought that:

> there was the sense in her house of an ongoing effort, of an upswing midmotion, a thing being built: A Successful Family, with the six of them involved in the effort, all striving for the common goal, as yet unreached. They were unfinished, in rehearsal, a production in progress, each performing his role with an affected aplomb, and with the stress of performance ever-presented for all as a soft sort of sound in the background. A hum.
> There was “him”, straining daily to perform the Provider, and Fola’s star turn as Suburban Housewife, and Olu’s fastidious-cum-favored First Son; the Artist, gifted, awkward; and the Baby. Then she. (GMG 123)

Her feelings of estrangement come to a head during the family gathering in Ghana following her father’s death. Walking down a beach, attempting to escape the family drama, she sees a colonial house and it reminds her of the house that she hated. She looked at it and thought to be just like the house: out of place; she also feels that she is not worthy of being loved and hugged and she feels envy for Sadie who has always been the loved one, the pretty one, the one who deserves attention. She feels rage against her mother who has never hugged her and that has even sent her away. When Fola goes to search for her, they have finally the chance to talk about what happened at Femi’s house, Taiwo has the chance to express all her sorrow and pain and Fola has the chance to explain her that she sent them away because she felt alone, with no money. Because of these reasons, she thought that taking the kids with her would deprive them from the wealthy life they deserve. At the end of this conversation, they are finally able to hug themselves.

Kehinde, just like his twin, deals with feelings of inferiority, failure and guilt; first of all, he is not able to detect a physical resemblance to the member of his family because he and Taiwo have a different skin complexion and do not resemble their

parents. He also suffers for his lack of identity. In addition, he has to deal with the weight of his father's secret since he was the one who knows that he was chased from his workplace; from that moment on, he is haunted by the thought of whether his father would have stayed with the family if he had behaved differently.

He thinks he has failed his father because he did not become a doctor like him and did not participate in the dream of a family medical practice; moreover, he feels guilty because he was not able to protect Taiwo from Uncle Femi and for his body's reaction to that sexual intercourse with her. The sum of all these things brings him to think that he is not a real Sai and to escape his family and the world by trying to commit suicide. Kehinde is finally able to find a connection with his father when he goes to choose his coffin; there he meets a man who asks him why his hands are so rough and he answers that he is an artist. The man says: "An Artist [..] you are a Sai then" (GMG 298) and tells him how his father used to spend the time "drawing and drawing" (GMG 298).

Sadie, the youngest of the Sai, has always struggled with her body. She was born prematurely and weighed very low as a baby and was, thus, overfed by his mother. She develops a bad relationship with her body shape and she wishes to be as pretty and thin as her sister and her mother or as beautiful as her friend Philae. This desire leads her to struggle with eating disorders: she suffers from bulimia and uses to vomit to avoid gaining weight. In addition to that, she also thinks to be the talentless daughter since she does not know which career she wants to pursue. She was very young when her father left, she barely remembers him and for this reason she feels to be lacking something. Eventually, she will come to an understanding of her identity when she meets her father's sister; she is astonished by the resemblance they share, so much so she feels as if looking at herself in a mirror and refers to it as the "joke of genetics" (GMG 264). She also discovers to be a talented dancer, to be able to dance like she has "a stranger inside her that knows what to do, knows this music, this movement, this footwork, this rhythm" (GMG 270). On Christmas morning, Sadie wakes up and looks at a little framed picture of the six of them, maybe their last picture all together with everybody looking in a different direction and "she now understands" (GMG 310).

The novel closes with Kweku's funeral. Fola had "in mind to toss his ashes to the sea breeze, to let the man free, end at beginning and that", but then the idea of him

scattered seems to be wrong because they have been "scattered enough" (GMG 314). So she decides to put the urn in the water and to "let him stay whole" (GMG 314).

After the ceremony, Ama, Kweku's second wife, comes to visit them and gives Fola a Ghana Must Go bag containing Kweku's slippers. As a symbol of the craving for stability and the comfort of home, when they reappear in this scene at the end of the novel they have become a symbol of the sense of belonging that has haunted the family, who has never experienced the sense of homeliness the slippers indicate (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 17). When she looks down, she sees her husband's face drawn in the dirt and starts a conversation with him. This is the final moment of pacification: Kweku and Fola admit their mistakes and justify themselves for leaving because they were immigrants and they only knew to leave. They also hope that their children will learn from their mistakes and they will "learn how to stay" (GMG 317), starting from the fact that they are finally a family and they are reunited for Christmas.

Although the Sais are involved in a process of migration or mobility that rejects a confining sense of place, they try to find a way to build connections between places and cultures which allows them to understand the multiple nature of their identities. They all try to do what Kweku tried first: to find a way to build a bridge "between worlds," to connect "a modern thing entirely and a product of there, North America, snow, cow products" with "an ancient thing, a product of here, hut, heat, raffia, West Africa" (GMG 52). According to Dusting Crawley,

> In Ghana, then, all the characters (re)affirm a sense of belonging together and a sense of identity for themselves, which in no small sense involves an Afropolitan multiplicity, a recognition of being, as Simon Gikandi defines it, "connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions" while not being locked within them, "to be of Africa and other worlds at the same time". That such an Afropolitan sense of belonging requires an ability to negotiate multiple components of identity and places of formation is readily apparent throughout *Ghana Must Go*. That such negotiation requires free movement, however, goes almost entirely unacknowledged in the text. (2018, 133).

In *Ghana Must Go*, Africa provides a space for reconciliation and reattachment to a family that is “weighless”, “unbound” and “drifting” (GMG 146) and that searches for a grounding.

4. OTHERNESS AND THE DIASPORIC SUBJECT

Americanah and *Ghana Must Go* present a group of characters of the New African Diaspora involved in a process of construction of their identities. Both novels "challenge the conventions of the typical immigrant novel where no alternative to life in America is entertained" (Goyal 2014, xii).

In this section I explore how the diasporic subject has to confront issues like otherness in order to define himself and his own identity; I will use as examples the characters of the novels analyzed in the previous chapters. I will, furthermore, point out all the features and tropes shared by the two novels taken into account, underlining the passages related to the construction of the identity of the diasporic subject.

The main characters presented in the novels in exam can fit the definition of Afropolitan given by Selasi in her article "Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?"(2005); in fact, all of them can be defined as Africans of the world. But being an Afropolitan, far from being a relief, is something that they have to learn how to live with and how to deal with; in fact, according to Selasi, the "Afropolitan must form an identity along three levels, which is national, racial and cultural, with subtle tension in between" (Selasi 2005, 530).

A premise on otherness is necessary to understand the process of the construction of the identity of diasporic subjects. The process of "Othering" in postcolonial theory refers to the colonized others who are "marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the center and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ego" (Ashcroft et al. 2002, 168). In fact, othering is the representation and definition of the colonized natives as inferior to their European counterparts. The term, also used by Gayatri Spivak, is linked to the processes used by the colonizers to create and sustain a negative image, a low consideration and negative assumptions about the colonized natives.

Even if the subjects taken into account cannot fit the definition of colonized people, they still suffer from the consequences of the colonial past of their countries, their country of origin or the one/ones of their ancestors and of the subsequent racism that they have to deal with.

For example, the perception of Africans or African Americans as Others in *Americanah* is presented in at least two ways: the first regards a geographical ostracism against Blacks or the poor from White Americans, expressed through the location at the marginality of the cities of all the places dedicated to Black people, as it happens with the hair salon; while the second is about the resentment of Other by another Other. As Akingbe and Adeniyi argue:

> A funny scenario of Otherised Other is presented, indicating a victim victimizing another victim. Labelling or configuration of others is further stressed beyond the geographical separation and grouping of people together in a place. As used here, it also implies using utterances, taking actions that pigeonhole the deprived, the less privileged into a category rooted in helplessness. (2017, 50)

This process is detected in the conflicts involving African immigrants in the United States and African American people.

According to Aretha Phiri: "Observing subjectivity and identity as transnational processes and terrains embedded in cultural and ideological mongrelism, Afropolitan fiction of the African diaspora advocates a phenomenology that seeks to complicate – 'engage with, critique, and celebrate' – in order to review 'what means to be African' in a contemporary postcolonial, post-apartheid global milieu and imagination" (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 39).

As a reaction to the process of othering that relegates the African to lowest rung on the social ladder, the novels present a trope of anxiety, very common in Afropolitan fiction, presented in correlation with the reflections on the sense of self. Afropolitan subjects are involved in a process of dismantlement of the narration that confines them to the margin of society occupying the victim position. Since the Afropolitan self is the result of multi-locality, of mobility and of the mix of different cultures, Afropolitan subjects are undeniably hybridized. At the same time, they feel the pressure to be extraordinary and to show to be extremely talented while the desire of many of them, affected by this burden, is to be just ordinary.

This is what happens to Sadie, who lives a huge stress because she does not know what she wants to be and which career she wants to pursue; she feels the urge to be as

brilliant as her brothers and sister. Also Taiwo experiences this kind of frustration when she is involved in a sexual scandal and she risks failing her career. The same urge and the necessity to succeed is shown by Ifemelu when she is not able to find a job in the United States and feels so desperate to accept to satisfy a man to gain the money to remain there; similar feelings of stress and despair affect also Obinze, who live the despair of being deported from UK to Nigeria, and Aunt Uju, who is desperate because she is not able to find a proper career although she is a brilliant doctor.

This feeling of anxiety is closely related to the consequences of the Blackness of the characters taken into exam. Blackness is a striking manifestation of their being others and to differ from the norm. For this reason, Ifemelu embarks on a journey of self-discovery when she has to confront herself with her skin color. As long as she lives in Nigeria, her skin complexion has no relevance, but when she arrives in the United States she finds out to be perceived as different by White people who see her as belonging to a lower social group and assimilate her to Black American people depriving her of her ethnic identity. Also Dike, Ifemelu's cousin, struggles with his own racial identity. He grows up with a mother who denies him the right to know his origins, who refuses to speak her own language with her son because she does not want to confuse him, she does not tell him who his father is and denies his blackness to protect her son. As a result, Dike knows what he is not but not who he is (AM 381). This rootlessness leads him to confusion because of the identities other people projected onto him. As a reaction, he starts to use African-American vernacular language to feel like his fellow schoolmates, he starts to suffer of depression and, at the end, this feeling of non-belonging leads him to attempt to commit suicide by swallowing some pills. Only after visiting Nigeria he is able to reconcile with himself; once he becomes aware of his father's identity and starts to know Lagos, he realizes he has the power to determine himself because he now understands where he came from (AM 424-425).

Both Dike and Sadie provide examples of the need for hybridity in the building of a diasporic subject's identity. They express their pain and discomfort by hurting themselves: Dike tries to commit suicide while Sadie suffers from eating disorder and she finds pleasure in stealing little objects from others (GMG 143). Both feel the urge to belong to a place and to a family because they don't understand where they come from.

Sadie does not accept her weight and wishes to be as graceful as her mother and sister. She is not able to understand how she can be so different from the members of her family: her skin is darker, she has "thick arms, thighs, high buttocks, broad shoulders, small bosom" (GMG 267). She continues to feel ugly, she thinks that:

> she could be her mother, this heavyset Naa, with the same angled eyes ("half-Chinesey", per Philae), same stature, short, sturdy, same negligible eyebrows, round face, rounded nose, like a button for coins. The joke of genetics. That of all his children it should have been she who inherited this appearance, the one who would spend the least time with their father and come to so loathe his particular feature. They worked just fine on *his* face: he was handsome in the way that a man can be, without being pretty, with the skin like this Naa's or like Olu's, so flawless. A tidy face. Elegant.
> Not so her own.
> Philae likes to call her a "natural beauty", while Fola uses phrases like "you'll come into your own" (in a tone reminiscent of "we'll find your hidden talent"), but Sadie knows better. She isn't pretty. End of story. Her eyes are too small and her nose is too round and she hasn't cheekbones like Taiwo or Philae, nor long slender limbs nor a clean chiseled jaw nor a dipping-in waist nor a jutting-out clavicle. (GMG 264-265)

She is, furthermore, frustrated because she thinks that she is the only Sai with no talent at all and that the only thing she has is a photographic memory. However, while in Ghana, she discovers her gift of dancing and she comes to terms with her own identity. Finally, she realizes that she belongs somewhere and that she is part of a family.

Thus, hybridity covers an important role for Afropolitan subjects that live in between countries and cultures and need to negotiate their own identity. Negotiation is useful in spaces of cultural encounter for what concerns identity, gender and class for the development of diasporic individual personalities, and hybridity is defined as an empowering feature (Bhabha 1994, 41).

Ghana Must Go also presents a series of race related issues. For example, Kweku is unfairly dismissed because he is a victim of the prejudices of his death patient's family. Sadie desires to be as White as her friend Philae because she is not aware of her roots and feels her blackness as an obstacle. On the contrary, Taiwo and Kehinde suffer for their light, because they are not considered as a part of a group but as outsiders.

Their light skin, a manifestation of their consanguinity with Somayina, causes them Uncle Femi's abuses as a kind of revenge. Similarly, in *Americanah*, Aunt Uju denies her son's skin color and tells him that he is not black because she doesn't want her son to be assimilated to the lowest rank of society.

Americanah's and *Ghana Must Go*'s narratives play a crucial role in the ongoing process of developing some recurring and recognizable tropes in Afropolitan literature. While Selasi's novel begins "with extraordinary, elongated prose-poetic description of a moment of dying" (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 9), Adichie's work, on the contrary, opens with an ordinary, prosaically described, moments of departure. Mobility-induced anxiety which entwines place and self is, thus, one of the central tropes of the novels (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 9). They are, furthermore, linked to the use of themes like return and self-understanding and each of the stories presents, in quite different modes, an anxiety about ways of seeing Africa and ways of being African in the contemporary world.

The trope of return for the four children of the Sai family is articulated in complex ways. When they go to Ghana, they are not coming home to Africa; on the contrary, they arrive as strangers to a continent that they do not aspire to be reclaimed by. For them, Ghana is an elsewhere linked only to their parents' origins: for Olu, it is linked to the bad memory related to the visit to his father in which he hoped to bring him back but discovered that she had a mistress; for Taiwo and Kehinde, Africa is related to the traumatic violence suffered at Uncle Femi's house; for Sadie it has no meaning, it is just related to the void caused by the runway father that she never knew called by her "The man from the Story" (GMG 149). In their case the return is a point of reconnection on African soil: they broke up in America and became scattered across the continents and finally they come to terms with the past.

This trip to Ghana becomes the opportunity for the Sais to get to know themselves better, to resolve their conflict and to heal old wounds. Their feelings on this experience can be summarized by Selasi's words when she affirms that "there is no return to Old Africa. There is me and what I am now and what I make of Africa when I am there" (2014) .

Adichie's *Americanah* shows an equally complex situation related to return. Even if Ifemelu is living a successful life in America and her blog is becoming more famous

every day, she suffers from homesickness. She describes the symptoms of her longing as "cement in her soul", she feels like "fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness" followed by "amorphous longings, shapeless desires" (AM 6). She longs for "a secure place of belonging or for a sense of re-rootedness, or, perhaps, reaspora" (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 12). According to Eva Rusk Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek in *Debating Afropolitanism*, the reaspora is the return of the diaspora to an original African location (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 16).

When Ifemelu thinks of the Nigerians who have returned back, she has the feeling of being missing something, as if these people were living her life; in fact, "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (AM 6). Her return home is also the possibility to reunite with her ex-boyfriend Obinze, the only one with whom "she never felt the need to explain herself" (AM 6), the one who embodies her feeling of longing for roots.

When she arrives in Nigeria, of course, she passes through a moment of disorientation and she needs to readjust to that world. She feels as if "Lagos assaulted her" (AM 385), like she is " falling into a new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar" (AM 385). She asks herself if "Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence?" (AM 385) and "she was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself" (AM387). In the concluding pages of the novel, Ifemelu is home and she is starting her new blog and she is discovering Lagos again.

If Ifemelu feels welcomed back home, this does not happen to Taiwo and Kehinde, who are involved in a scene of ridicule very common in immigrant fiction. The twins share a cab on their drive to Fola's house in Accra, where they have to meet the other members of the family. Some beggars hold up the car for money and the cab driver shouts at them. When Kehinde gives them money, the driver calls the beggars thieves and affirms that only tourists give money to those thieves. When Kehinde tells him that they are not tourists, the driver only laughs at them. In most immigrant fiction where the migrant or his/her children return back to where the family originally came from, there is a similar scene of ridicule whose function is to worsen the feeling of not belonging and the resulting disappointment. The rhetoric of using the concept of

tourists, emigrants, and exiles points to a meta-level of analysis that highlights the hybridity inherent in the genre of immigrant fiction (Wallinger 2019, 209).

The relationship established by Adichie and Selasi's characters with Africa is an expression of the authors' relationship with the African continent and it can be summarized using the words of Achille Mbembe, when he affirms that Afropolitanism is a type of cosmopolitanism in Africa that predates colonial history; he suggests that Afropolitanism is a "worlds-in-movement phenomenon", which relies on the "interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the here and vice versa and the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner" (2007, 28). He continues by arguing that Afropolitanism has to be seen as an aesthetic and particular poetic of the world: it is a way of being in the world that refuses the victim position. As a consequence, Afropolitan literature can be explored as a new space of investigation into the effects of globalization on the African character and the African place, and it is important to bear in mind that this space is flexible, inclusive and unpredictable, since it is a space of enquiry into Africa and Africanness (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 10). As suggested by Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek in *Debating the Afropolitan*:

> One of the trope that can be detected in the novels in the one of a mobility induced anxiety about place and about self; it seems to emerge, not from a sense of loss, but from being in transit, and multi-local, while commuting across geographical locations and feeling a sense of belonging to all or none of them. This anxiety is thus attached to a sense of being culturally hybrid and multi-local and, furthermore, to a recurring sense of unease about belonging, again felt in connection to place and, in a profoundly ontological or existential way, to a sense of self, as individual in a globalized, twenty-first-century world. (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 12)

Comparing the literary production of earlier generations of African writers to the recent ones, it can be noticed how the approach to the trope of return has changed. While traditional or recognizable African characters always have the chance to return to a familiar place where they feel a sense of belonging and attachment, many Afropolitan writers, and their characters, "typically elaborate on a reconnection or notion of going back which is emphatically different from the certainty implied by the notion of return"

(Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 12), because they are connected to Africa as they are to other parts of the world at the same time.

Americanah and *Ghana Must Go* present many explorations of the ways of being African through an anxious self-reflection and they show some of the many ways of seeing and understanding Africa. Through the trope of return, the subjects of the novels "trouble the signifier Africa" (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 20) and encourage the audience to abandon prejudices and follow them on their journey of discovery.

As it is clear, the Afropolitan critical inquiry focuses on the meaning of Africa and is about the search of the many different ways in which Africa is seen and perceived. Far from being a place of safe return, Africa emerges as a series of diverse cultural places. As affirmed by Knudsen and Rahbek:

> Afropolitan narratives clearly work to resist 'diminiaturization' and to cast Africa as a complex space of continental dimensions. This, of course, also means that Afropolitan writers debunk the outmoded expectation that their narratives should bear the burden of representing an entire continent. (Durán-Almarza et al. 2019, 20)

In a conversation among Gikandi, Knudsen and Rahbek, the first adds one more image of the 'Africas' circulating in our century:

> There is the Africa that scholars engage with seriously, and there is an Africa of the imagination, which also carries remnants of the Old Africa of the Western imagination. We no longer perform the racist representations of Africa, but they lie under the surface occasionally. Africa tends to be caught between these two representations. But there is also a third dimension: a romantic desire for Africa. (Knudesen and Rahnìbek 2016, 46)

What brings Adichie and Selasi to these kinds of reflection about Africa are certainly their cultural background and their life experiences. They are definitely transcultural writers who, by choice or by life circumstances, have experienced cultural dislocation and transnational experiences involving multiple cultures and territories. The diversity they have been exposed to has created their plural and flexible identities. Their literary production can be conceived as a dialogue beyond the borders of nations and across

cultures, the first step to start a communication among people and cultures to engender a new peace and harmony.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this thesis I have explored the themes of otherness and identity of the diasporic subjects of the New African Diaspora. My analysis focuses on two novels, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi, both published in 2013. Exploiting a number of autobiographical elements, both authors give voice to a generation of young Africans or young people of African descent living in the United States, whose hybridized existences place them among the people who have to struggle to understand the complexity of a transnational and global existence.

To fully understand Adichie and Selasi's discourse about identity, I have given a brief outline on the history of the New African Diaspora, of Afropolitanism, of the Afropolitan subjects and their literary production. Within this cultural framework, a new trend of literature produced by novelists belonging to the generation of diasporic and Afropolitan subjects is identified. These authors are involved in the process of creating cultural bridges between the African continent and other Western countries (Gikandi 2011, 11) and their literary production is described as migrant, global, postcolonial or African American literature.

Among them, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* explore the great variety of issues related to Blackness and diasporic identity. Both authors embody the perfect example of cosmopolitan, well educated, Black women who write to give voice to a generation of young Black people who are not victims of a forced diaspora but who choose to travel, to study abroad, to increase their social condition and who define themselves as citizens of the world.

In *Americanah*, Adichie tells the story of a Nigerian girl, Ifemelu, who moves to the United States to attend college and, once there, deals with her Blackness and with all the problems related to it. Ifemelu becomes a blogger and embarks on a journey that, passing through the exploration of the concept of race and identity, will lead her to the discovery of the complexity of herself and her fellow African immigrants. In the novel, Ifemelu discovers race in the United States and its embedded position in American society and has to deal with issues of race and racism. She understands how class and

white privilege intersect with one another and have a strong influence on American society and its structure.

Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, whose title refers to the plastic tote bag used by Ghanaian people expelled from Nigeria under the government of Shehu Shagari, follows the vicissitudes of the Sai family. It opens with the scene of the death of Kweku Sai, a renowned heart surgeon who ironically dies of a heart attack. Through flashbacks and shifts in time, Selasi presents us a dysfunctional family of six in which, despite academic or working success, every one of the members has to struggle with his own identity and with a feeling of homelessness and never belonging.

In the final section, I focus on otherness and on the identity of the diasporic subject by comparing the two novels presented. In Adichie's *Americanah* and Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* flow all the fluidity of the present age; the novels show the confluence of global culture, the mobility and the nomadic nature of the human beings of our time and the need to dismantle a monolithic culture in favor of a polyvalent society. The authors use topics like success, anxiety, Blackness, the return to Africa and self-understanding as ways of complicating the meaning of being African or from Africa in the western world – specifically, the United States – today. Since their works are highly transversal and comprehensible only through a transnational perspective, their literature "comprise a genre of literature that mirrors the transformative nature of African experiences in the global environment of today's world" (Emenyonu 2017, 213).

Adichie and Selasi fit the description of the Afropolitan subject given by Selasi and used throughout the thesis to describe the authors' experiences and their character peculiarities. Afropolitanism draws on cosmopolitanism. The second was first conceived as a complex concept related to elitist, ethnic-utopic meaning as it referred to travelers who can truly claim the world as their home. Recently, its definition has changed and it is no longer viewed as a "luxurious flee-floating view from above" but as a "fundamental devotion to the interest of humanity as a whole" (Durán Almarza et al. 2019, 83). As a consequence, the meaning of cosmopolitanism has been extended to cover "transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are underprivileged" (Robbins 1998, 1) and it now regards " the growing interdependence and interconnections of social actors across national boundaries" (Beck 2008, 26). Even

though Selasi's formulation of Afropolitanism has its roots on these concepts, it has been accused to be problematic because of its "elitist and identity/author/person centered emphasis" (Durán Almarza et al. 2019, 87).

Mbembe's theories on Afropolitanism seems to be more applicable for analytical purposes, because according to him Afropolitanism denotes the process of hybridization and transculturalization that have informed the construction of Africa and its identity all along. He argues that it includes an " awareness of the interweaving of here and there, the presence of the elsewhere here and vice versa (2007, 28). According to Anna Lena Toivanen, in *Debating the Afropolitan*, Mbembe's idea is based on mobility and the transcultural encounters that it generates; however it differ from Selasi's thought because she excludes the African who live in the continent while he thinks that the transculturation that lies at the core of Afropolitanism does not necessitate physical travel away from the continent because the history of the continent is profoundly marked by mobility and itinerancy in terms of both immersion (people of elsewhere living in Africa) and dispersion (African diasporas) (Durán Almarza et al. 2019, 95).

Based on the above, Afropolitanism seems to highlight the interconnections of Africa with the rest of the world but it remains unclear how it differs from the concept of hybridity and transculturalism. Transculturalism must be conceived as a vision of how the world is coming together and breaking boundaries and geographical barriers. By examining many of the features of emigration, Adichie and Selasi use their character to comment on international relations and contemporary global politics and to display ways in which emigration can sometimes transgress geographical boundaries and connect, rather than simply challenge. Migration has served to connect peoples and cultures in the twenty-first century.

Thus, transcultural works and writers must be defined as the ones who often record and express the merging nature of cultures and who contribute to replace the traditional dichotomies that have characterized multicultural and postcolonial discourse, such as: North and South, the West and the rest of the world, colonizer and colonized, dominator and dominated, native and migrant, national and ethnic (Dagnino 2012, 11).

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that Adichie and Selasi are definitely transcultural writers, who by choice or by life circumstances have experienced cultural dislocation and transnational experiences involving multiple cultures and territories.

They have been exposed to a form of diversity that has created their plural and flexible identities and their literary production can be conceived as a dialogue beyond the borders of nations and across cultures, the first step to start a communication among people and cultures to engender a new peace and harmony.

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