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**AFRICAN DREAMS OF AMERICA: DIASPORA EXPERIENCE IN THE
WRITINGS OF AIDOO, ADICHIE AND COLE**

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores four African diasporic texts against a backdrop of the African dream of America, diasporic experience, post-colonialism and racism in the U.S. as portrayed in the writings of Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1971), Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2014), and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2012) and *Every Day Is for the Thief* (2014). I argue that the African dream of America is different but also exemplary of the American experience and therefore a privileged lens for understanding "America." During the course of this research project, I found that while the writings of Adichie and Aidoo are primarily about diaspora experience, the writings of Cole focus more on the global experience of modernity and capitalism, and their disappointing realities not only for African diaspora communities but other racial groups in the U.S. and globally. That is, the emphasis of this study is on post-colonialism and African diaspora experience in Aidoo and Adichie's works. To illustrate, while the characters in Aidoo and Adichie's writings, in particular Eulalie and Ifemelu, are migrating from America

to Ghana and Nigeria to America respectively, in search of the American and African dreams, and to reconnect to their African homelands, characters in Cole's writings are being alienated, dehumanized and silenced by the devastating reality of global modernity and capitalism, exemplified by America but not exclusive to it. I unmask the construction of diaspora experience in these diaspora African fictional narrative and their ramifications for African diaspora communities. The study is informed by the theories and methods of race studies, African studies, colonial and post-colonial studies. Employing a post-colonial literary criticism, this study offers new ways of thinking about the relationship between African dreams of America, diaspora experience, race, post-colonialism and "modernity." I analyze the depiction of the African dream of America and the diaspora experience in fiction produced by African diaspora writers, exploring fictions' ability to do justice to diasporic Ghana and Nigerian experience. The literature I consider in this project addresses the historical specificity of the African diaspora experience but of equal importance it critically engages and exemplifies the American experience and global modernity.

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Introduction: My African Dreams of America, Diaspora and Postcolonial Experience

This dissertation is not the one I intended to write. I planned to elaborate the uniqueness of the transnational U.S. immigrant literature written by people of African origin writing in English. I found this literature to be unlike the work of other immigrants that came to the United States and to be unique in its African diaspora and modernity perspective. Instead, my encounter with the writings of Ama Ata Aidoo, Chimamanda Adichie, and especially Teju Cole brought about a fundamental shift in my understanding of African diaspora experience, and especially their African dreams of America, and what I came to recognize as American deceptions. The turning point was a conversation with the author Teju Cole that I had in March of 2016 in Santa Fe New Mexico and my following re-readings of his books *Open City* and *Every Day Is for the Thief*. The key texts explored in this study are Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day Is for the Thief*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*.

Cole came to New Mexico to read from his most recent book *Every Day Is for the Thief* at the Lensic in Santa Fe. He was delighted to meet me—a man of the same country, the same tribal group, and speaker of the same language, Yoruba—in the meet and greet line following his event. He invited me for coffee and we have corresponded ever since. In that conversation and the correspondence that followed I came to understand that Cole's writing, and those of other African authors use African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience, and address both the historical specificity of the African trans-national American immigrant experience but also of equal importance it critically engages and exemplifies the American experience and global modernity. Furthermore, the writings of these diaspora authors demonstrate that the African dream of America is different but also exemplary of the American experience and therefore a privileged lens for understanding "America."

In other words, this dissertation explores African diaspora experience as articulated in the writings of Aidoo, Adichie and Cole. The dissertation engages the complexities and dynamics of diaspora experience of the characters portrayed in these texts. It engages diaspora discourses such as the notion of a return to one's homeland, race and racism, assimilation, culture and gendered violence. Furthermore, the portrayal of these characters reveals that they are diaspora subjects, marginalized, dehumanized and disenfranchised by systemic and racial subjugation. The study reveals the ways in which the characters in these novels respond to their situations, survive and negotiate their diaspora experience.

For example, how are characters like Eulalie and Ifemelu able to resist and challenge racial, cultural and gendered violence and oppression they are subjected to in Africa and the U.S. respectively? How are they able to empower themselves in the face of patriarchy, institutional racism and oppression and hegemonic structure of power? What are the factors working against these diaspora subjects and what are the infrastructures that have helped to sustain systemic oppression and hegemonic structure of power in the diaspora? How are these factors sustained and what are the institutions that help to sustain them? How can they be dismantled so diaspora subjects like Eulalie and Ifemelu can regain their freedom, equality, and self-empowerment? I should mention that post-colonialism is also central to the dissertation. However, my use of post-colonialism is in service of African diaspora experience as represented in these texts.

Whether it is Eulalie seeking freedom, equality, empowerment and desiring to reconnect with her ancestral homeland in Ghana, or Ifemelu seeking the African dreams of America, the African diaspora is about the movements of these characters and their resettlement in these places. The writings of Aidoo and Adichie engage, articulate and complicate the challenges,

dynamics and complexities of the African diaspora communities and their experiences. This study examines the complexities of African diaspora experience as represented in these diaspora fictional narratives. Some of the issues raised by African diaspora include assimilation, culture and tradition, patriarchy, gendered violence, belonging, return to one's homeland, racial oppression and systemic injustices.

In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, for instance, Eulalie is an African-American woman seeking happiness, equality and self-fulfillment in Ghana. Eulalie immigrates to Ghana not only to seek love and happiness, which was denied her in the U.S, but to reconnect with her ancestral homeland in Ghana. Sadly, the happiness and equality that she seeks in Ghana completely eludes her due to several factors. One of the primary reasons she is disappointed is because the Ghanaian natives were hostile to her, and also because Eulalie is disrespectful of the Ghanaians, their culture and tradition. As a result of Eulalie's condescending and disparaging attitudes towards the Ghanaian natives, she is ridiculed and oppressed in return.

All these factors worked against Eulalie's desires and Ghanaian dreams. And while Eulalie is seeking the Ghanaian dream, Ifemelu was seeking the American dream. In the U.S., Ifemelu expects to be treated with respect. She seeks equality, justice and prosperity. Sadly, her African American dreams becomes an illusion. She is dehumanized, marginalized and silenced. Like Eulalie, Ifemelu is disappointed because her African American dream turns into disappointment due to several factors. One of these is racism and systemic injustices that she faced living in America. Furthermore, Ifemelu is dehumanized and alienated in the U.S not only because she is a woman but because she is black.

By using African dreams as a lens for understanding the complexities of diaspora experience, I am talking about understanding the complexity of African diaspora communities in

the United States, the notion of a return to homelands, their struggle to assimilate into American culture, their achievements and failures, how difficult it is to assimilate to America, and what it entails living in America as African diaspora populations, as exemplified, for instance, by Eulalie's return to Ghana in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*.

The notion of a return to the homelands, diaspora experience, the struggle to attain freedom, peace, self-fulfillment and empowerment are some of the major themes accentuated in the fictional narratives explored in this study. These apply not only to Eulalie, an African American, who is seeking the African dreams of equality, freedom, justice and self-empowerment but to several other characters, including Julius in Cole's *Open City* and Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*, who are seeking the American dreams: happiness, wealth, freedom, justice, equality, and empowerment. In other words, most of the characters portrayed in these novels are escaping the racial subjugation and oppression, inequality, poverty, political and economic instabilities, that are pervasive in their native countries. Therefore, not only do these characters' journeys exemplify the complexities of African immigration, and modernity, but they underscore the ramifications of diaspora experience.

In these African diaspora writings, the American dreams is consumed, critiqued, and reworked and they become African dreams of America that are simultaneously an American deception. In the process, the works of Aidoo, Adichie, and Cole become a privileged place for understanding African diaspora experience, African dreams of America, the American racist deception, the African illusion of America from the perspective of African diaspora and modernity's critique. That new understanding is an intervention into post-colonialism, African diaspora and modernity not only in the fact that it allows us to see the manners in which these writers are using their works as tools to reject colonialism and oppression but also how through

the critiques of the American dreams these diaspora African authors better understand and critique their home countries.

Clarifying African Vision of America African Diaspora and Modernity

This study is not specifically about the American dreams or even the dreams of the longtime resident African-American population. That is, I am not interested in exploring what the “American dreams” means, its evolution or theories. However, I am interested in African dreams of America, the notion of a return to the homeland, the complexity of diaspora experience, diasporic African writers, or, how these African diaspora authors dreams about America. In order words, the core of my analysis lies in the African dreams of America, American racist deceptions, and how these factors are used as a lens to understand the complexity of diaspora experience. Furthermore, the study is not about *The Cosby Show*. This situation comedy is only central to the study as a means to understand how the discourse of the African dreams of America and how it helps to shape the misleading perception that the U.S was a land of liberty and equality, a “promised land.”

It is in our acceptance of the deception that America dream represents that we, Africans, participate and (re) produce a (post) the deception of America. However, I must mention that despite the disappointing nature of the American dreams, it is realizable for a surprising number of African diaspora communities in the U.S., including Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie, whose writings this study focuses on. For example, in addition to graduating from Princeton University, Adichie is also the winners of several reputable awards, including the MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant and the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction.

Furthermore, I use the phrase African dreams of America to describe African diasporic communities in America. I will use the phrase “modernity and colonial mission” to characterize Euro-American white supremacy, violence and modernity perpetrated against African diaspora populations at home and in the U.S. diaspora. In other words, my use of “African diaspora and modernity mission” in the dissertation is not a reference to European colonization of Africa which occurred in the 19th century.

Finally, I will use the phrase “modernity” to describe the draconian, individualistic and detrimental aspects of the American society. That is, I will also use this phrase to characterize the pervasive culture of corruption, abuse, violence, apathy and intolerance in the U.S., which continue to serve as obstacles to African diaspora communities achieving the African dreams of America. The American dream of Africa as the experiences of these characters demonstrates is an illusion. In his book *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture*, Patrick Manning defines modernity as

The condition of life today and in the recent past—a condition filled with triumphs, complexities, and disasters in industry, science, government, and communication, bringing progress, oppression, capitalism, and inequality. African diaspora and modernity is a condition that is deeply felt and almost universally experienced. Too often, however, it is deemed narrowly and then explained in such a fashion as to exclude black people from it. African diaspora and modernity is the overall ethos of the modern world, in economic, social, cultural, and other realms; it is an exhilarating but difficult situation.¹

As the above quote shows, “modernity” is full of complexities; these include the devastating impacts of capitalism, systemic oppression, industrial expansion, and environmental degradation and disasters. These factors are helping to marginalize, dehumanize and disenfranchise not only African diaspora communities in the U.S., but other racial groups, including white Americans, exacerbating their hopelessness.

Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on African diaspora communities in America and not on all African diaspora populations. It should be noted that the experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S. are not the same. I want to avoid generalizing African diaspora experience so as not to collapse African diaspora populations into a singular category. For example, Sudanese, Somalis and Egyptian immigrants face different conditions than Nigerian, Ghanaian and South African diaspora communities in the U.S. to the U.S.

In these four diaspora African novels, the complexity of diaspora communities and experience and African dreams of America are consumed, critiqued, and reworked and they become African Americans dreams that are simultaneously an American deception. In the process, the works of Aidoo, Adichie, and Cole become a privileged place for understanding our common America from the perspective of African diaspora and modernity's critique. That new understanding is an intervention into African diaspora and modernity not only in the fact that it allows us to see the manners in which these writers are using their works as tools to reject racial oppression but also how through the critiques of the American dreams and the complexity of diaspora experience these African authors better understand and critique their home countries.

My African Dreams of America and American Deceptions

Like Ifemelu and Julius, Adichie's and Cole's protagonists in *Americanah* and *Open City* respectively, I was deceived and lured to the United States by the promise of the American dreams portrayed in situation comedies like *The Cosby Show*. Before moving to America, I imagined a country where not only could I succeed in my education but a place where my aspirations could be reached and attained. American television including *The Cosby Show* as well as soap operas like *The Young and the Restless* and *One Life to Live*, served as my models

of the American experience. Like the fictional characters in these products of U.S. mass media, I had high expectations that in this country I could achieve anything I set my mind to do. I anticipated a country full of unlimited possibilities, equality, justice and individual liberty. So, in order to achieve my African dreams of America, I traveled from Nigeria to the U.S. in 2005. In my naïve belief in American possibility my opportunity to achieve my American dreams was finally here, or, so I thought.

In Nigeria, I, like millions of other Nigerians, and by extension many Africans, were in love with virtually everything emanating from America, whether they are moral or immoral, inspiring or unexciting, from television shows to popular culture narratives, to fashion style, slangs, thoughts, ideas and trends. Despite our naivety about race relations in America, despite our lack of knowledge of the reality of life in America, and despite our lack of understanding and in-depth knowledge of American situation comedies like *The Cosby Show*, these television programs appealed greatly to millions of Nigerian audience like me. Prior to moving to the U.S., I anticipated seeing and living in the beautiful Brooklyn Brownstone house like the Huxtables. What Nigerian immigrants like me did not understand is that television shows like *The Cosby Show* are distorted mirror of fantasy of the American experience for the vast majority of Americans, including whites. I should mention that Africans from across the continent are keenly aware, sometimes in exaggerated fashion, of problematic race relations in the U.S.

In their book, *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dreams*, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis argue that “the American dreams is just that, a fantasy that few can or will ever realize. It is a fantasy sustained by anecdotes and success stories that focus on exceptions, rather than the norm.”² It is a mirage not only for these immigrants but for other racial groups, including white Americans. These diaspora communities do not live in

free societies. They are marginalized and treated like second class citizens. Despite the tumultuous and often agonizing reality of inequality, racism and structural injustices in America, the superficiality or even lie in the country are attractive to people from other parts of the world, especially those from subaltern places like Africa. This is the sad irony of the African dreams of America. I should add that there is a lot of unrealistic and even unreasonable propaganda in African media about what success symbolizes for the common citizen. The degree to which these fantasies are influenced by American culture is certainly open to study, but they are indigenously produced.

The irony of these superficial and deceptive American culture is that similar shows like the ones mentioned above existed in Nigeria. However, Nigerian audience were usually more interested in American shows than the hundreds of television shows being produced in the country. In the 1970s and 80s, millions of Nigerians had developed intense interest in these American television shows and would do anything to watch them. For the millions of us watching these American shows, we were not doing so merely for entertainment purposes. Rather, we watched the shows believing that one day we could immigrate to America and begin to enjoy the African dreams of American: the beautiful landscapes, the tall skyscrapers, the opulent lifestyle and peaceful neighborhoods represented in television shows like *The Cosby Show*. I should also mention that several African nations home-grown entertainment now surpasses American programming in popularity.

So, for us, watching American television was for the fulfilment and realization of things we had completely lost in Nigeria: peace of mind, beautiful houses, employment opportunities, beautiful infrastructure and amenities, all of which we believed we could one-day experience when we would migrate to the U.S. We believed that these American treasures we desperately

longed for and dreams about in Nigerian could one day become our reality. What I and the African authors that are the concern of this dissertation found was something else.

African Dreams of America, Nigerian and Ghanaian Critiques

This study confronts the African dreams of America, including my own and what African authors, including Teju Cole, Chimamanda Adichie, and Ama Ata Aidoo are telling us sometimes implicitly or unconsciously in their novels- *Open City*, *Every Day Is for the Thief*, *Americanah* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* about their American Dreams. In the pages to follow, I explore the relationship between these diaspora writings and the African dreams of America. I employ a diasporic and modernity framework as a means to unravel the complicated relationship of Africans and their American dreams, and to understand their construction and performance in the U.S. as objects and agents in American notions of national experience and implicit negative formations of American deceptions and African realities.

Furthermore, in the course of this research, I realized that it is through these African dreams of America and its critique that these African authors sometimes better understand and critique their home countries. To illustrate, in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, she criticizes Euro-American colonial oppression and modernity's influences on Africa while at the same time condemning the Ghanaian natives for their disparaging attitude toward Eulalie. In Ghana, Eulalie is outnumbered, silenced, and marginalized. By criticizing the Ghanaians for their negative treatment of Eulalie, not only is Aidoo questioning African tradition and culture but she is also shedding light on its damaging impacts on the oppressed populations like Eulalie. As a result, Aidoo's play serves to use Eulalie's experience in Ghana not only as a lens to understand

the complexity of the diaspora experience but also to complicate the notion of a return to the “homeland.”

Moreover, the study seeks to understand the common ground shared by these authors, who are all writing about the African dreams of America, the complexity of diaspora experience, and modernity. While these writers are well known for their ability to shed light on African dreams of America, racism and African diaspora and modernity, their writings are attractive not only because of their narrative strategies, style, characterization, pragmatic features, and themes but also because of their abilities to construct and perform African dreams of America as both different but also exemplary of the American experience and therefore a privileged experience for understanding America, colonial and racial oppression. Ama Ata Aidoo argues that, “

...the only thing is that the committed artist has to be an activist. The thing is that if you are committed, you would be an activist, whether through your mode of writing or other areas. We need to be out there...if everything were equal, we wouldn't be asking the writer and the artists to also be going out there actively participating in the struggle. But, we know that everything is not equal where we come from.³

It seems as though Aidoo applies this statement to all the oppressed subaltern populations and marginalized groups in the society, especially African diaspora communities, making Aidoo not only a human right activist but also a fighter for equality and justice. By appropriating a significant tool of their marginalization and underrepresentation in America, racial, African diaspora and modernity's oppression, these writers reconstruct it to empower the disenfranchised African diaspora subject.

Using a postcolonial, African diaspora and modernity literary criticism, I explore these authors strategies of wielding this appropriated tool to dismantle modernity's dehumanizing impacts on African diaspora communities and subaltern populations, empowering the subject

hood of marginalized African community in the U.S. Commenting, for instance, on how these authors are using their writings as weapon against oppression created by the failure of the American dreams, African diaspora and modernity and racial injustices in America, Laura Charlotte Kempen in her book *Mariama Ba, Rigoberta Menchu and African diaspora and modernity Feminism* argues that

Being marginalized by both the self-defined center (US/Europe) and patriarchy within their own cultures, these authors are able to view the complexities of African diaspora and modernity and imperialistic domination that cause tortuous effects on individuals and communities. Through their personal experience of psychological and physical trauma, their perspectives compel them to work towards reinventing and redefining power structures, which exclude them. In order to accomplish this task, they reveal oppressive systems and expose the complexities of their African diaspora and modernity situations.⁴

The authors I have selected represent pioneers of African diaspora writers, who base their writings on the African dreams of America, the complexity of diaspora experience and modernity. Not only are these writers well known in their fields but their writings best represent the voice of the African people at home and abroad and best represent the reality of the African dream of America. Furthermore, the unique qualities of these writers' works are immense: first, is their use of artistic, unconventional style and secondly the characters they use to depict what Kempen calls "physical and psychological traumas"⁵ that many African diaspora communities face in the U.S. as a result of oppression and systemic injustices.

African Diaspora Experience

One of the primary goals of postcolonial and African diaspora literary criticism is the denunciation and rejection of Euro-American influences, modernity and their vestiges on the marginalized and colonized subaltern populations in places like Africa, South America and other

formerly colonized territories. According to Vijay Mishra and Bod Hodge post-colonialism foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle and problematizes the key relationship between center and periphery.”⁶ Similarly in his book *Living in Two Worlds: A African diaspora and modernity Readings of the Acts of the Apostles*, Ruben Munoz-Larrondo argues that

postcolonial theory is an attempt to interrupt to read contrapuntally and interrogatively the tragic experiences of those dispossessed of voice and discriminated against, those who have suffered the sentence of history, in order, instead, to formulate critical revisions of cultural differences and empowering strategies of emancipations.⁷

As a theoretical approach, post-colonialism forces writers and readers to not only reexamine but to reject modernity’s oppression and their impacts on the colonized subaltern populations, in particular African diaspora communities at home and abroad. Defining the term post-colonialism further, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *Post-African diaspora and modernity Studies: The Key Concepts* argue that it is a way “of reading and rereading texts of both metropolitan and African diaspora and modernity cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of colonization on literary production; anthropological accounts; historical records, administrative and scientific writing.”⁸

Similarly, Edward Said, the author of *Orientalism* (1979) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) is considered one of the scholarly pioneers who reject the belief that the West is superior to the East- the Occident and the Orient. In *Orientalism*, Said was able to demonstrate that “European literary creations were no more than a representation of the writers, rather than of those written about.”⁹ Like Said, Epifanio San Juan argues that

I consider post-African diaspora and modernity as the cultural logic of this mixture and multilayering of forms taken as the ethos of late African diaspora and modernity, a logic distanced from its grounding in the unsynchronized interaction between the civilizations of the African diaspora and modernity powers and the colonized...African diaspora and modernity theory, in brief, can be read as

metaphysical idealism masking its counterrevolutionary telos by denying its own worldly interest and genealogy.¹⁰

Post-colonial literary frameworks like those of Said and Epifanio push writers and critics to engage and critique the manners in which African diaspora experience and representations are deployed in literature. Post-colonial literary criticism posits that racial oppression of the subaltern population in places like South America, the Middle East, Asia and Africa are real and destructive. In his essay *African diaspora and modernity Criticism as an Optic for Biblical Studies*, Ruben Munoz-Larrondo argues that in these literary creations,

Inherent African diaspora and modernity and imperialism came to the fore with overtones of superiority, missionizing obligations, mercantilism, and territorial expansion. Because of these overtones, studies of these texts demanded a break from the typical silence of the academy and the rhetoric of complicity, a break from the methodical silencing and denying of the voices of these peoples-groups who were studies, a rupture from the habitual promoting of the colonizer on the one side and the denigrating and obliterating of the local values of the colonized on the other.¹¹

As the above quote demonstrates, Post-colonial criticism acknowledges that in order to destroy oppression on these marginalized, silenced and subaltern populations, readers and writers must not only expose the dynamics and ramifications of colonial oppression but must reject and renounce it, suggesting that European history, values and culture are superior while those of the marginalized and oppressed populations. Post-colonialism acknowledges the damaging impacts Eurocentrism on the values and cultures of the subaltern populations. It exposes the fact that European values are universal and natural while those of colonized populations are immoral, inferior, or barbaric.

In this study, a postcolonial criticism of Cole's *Open City*, Adichie's *Americanah* and Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* begin by looking at the damaging impacts of Euro-American

oppression and colonialism of Ghana and Nigeria and by extension the entire African continent. Furthermore, a post-colonial approach to Cole's *Open City* might begin by exploring the damaging impacts of modernity, and oppression on the marginalized and colonized subaltern African communities in the United States. Post-colonial literary criticism of these writings might also begin by examining the following questions: What do these writings accentuate about the way Ghanaian culture was damaged and undermined by Euro-American presence? What do these texts reveal about the way cultural difference was negotiated in Euro-American literature? How did Euro-American justify their African diaspora and modernity presence by conceptualizing and imagining subaltern populations as "uncultured" and "uncivilized."

Taking my conversation with Cole as inspiration, I add a Jameson-style Marxist horizon to my post-colonial critique of these authors' works and ultimately to the world they describe. Like Cole's postcolonial critique, Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) critiques modernity and postmodernism from a Marxist perspective. Jameson's book suggests that the destructive impacts of modern infrastructure on African diaspora community and the society as a whole is a product of modernity. For Jameson, postmodernity results in "an immense dilation of cultures sphere (the sphere of commodities...an immense and historically original acculturation of the real." Interestingly, Cole seems to critique the American dreams, racism and "modernity" by emulating Jameson's Marxist approach, providing us with a new way of looking at post-African diaspora and modernity. Like Jameson, Cole is very critical of the American dreams, capitalism, and their dehumanizing and alienating impacts not only on not only the African immigrant community in the U.S. but also on other racial groups, including white Americans.

As a literary critic, the final horizon of my analysis is to use post-colonial literary criticism as a tool to understand the effects of modernity on the subaltern populations and characters portrayed in these writings, and how they are addressed through the plot, setting, theme and characters' actions. Post-colonial criticism also questions hegemony and dominant forms of knowledge, history and culture and their oppressive impacts on the colonized subaltern populations. This perspective challenges these dominant forms of knowledge while raising the culture and voices of the silenced and colonized populations. As a post-colonial writer, Cole, Adichie and Aidoo seek to undo the destructive legacies of colonialism and modernity and on the colonized and marginalized subaltern African diaspora communities in the U.S.

As Juluette Bartlett-Pack argues in her essay *Recovery the Past: Transatlantic Migration*, African diaspora community immigrate to the U.S. to attempt to heal on an individual level the opportunities these immigrants' communities have been denied in their native countries. Instead, they face what she describes as "apathy and abandonment, which on a larger scale is indicative of many black American families." Rather than achieve the African dreams of American, they face oppression and alienation. Bartlett-Pack remarks further that these immigrants "journey to wholeness from feelings of alienation is fraught with conflicts, crises, and obstacles..."¹²

African Diaspora Narratives and African Dreams of America

The unprecedented increase in the African immigrant population in the U.S. has resulted in the emergence of notable African diaspora writers, including Ama Ata Aidoo, Chimamanda Adichie, and Teju Cole. The emergence of these writers has also led to several books being published documenting the struggles and challenges these diaspora communities face in America. These writers are producing African diaspora narratives that protest the badly damaged

images of Africans in literature produced by the West and from Western perspectives. They are writing to showcase these immigrants' challenges all in an effort to bring a human face to their experience. For example, a novel such as Adichie's *Americanah* not only seeks to expose the dehumanization of African diaspora communities in the U.S.' communities in American but it also portrays these immigrants' experiences in the U.S. through the eyes of a Nigerian immigrant named Ifemelu, a depiction that contrasts significantly with the stereotypical and damaging representations of Africans by notable European writers like Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary.

Unlike the Euro-American disparaging representations of the continent, African diaspora writers like Cole, Adichie and Aidoo are not only positively representing the experiences of Africans but they are exposing the apparatus that are working against their achievement of prosperity and fulfilment. Not only are these writers using their writings as tools to put a human angle to African diaspora communities in the U.S.' experience but they also bring to light the institutional racism, oppression and the various power structures designed to frustrate these immigrants from achieving the American dreams. Silva states that

Thematically topical and polemic, the writing in both texts is raw and confrontational in its depiction of self in the face of physical pain and psychological distress. Adichie returns the return to an aesthetics of excess firmly grounded on potently disturbing images of the body in pain...the battered, bruised and scarred body emerges as a key image, a corporeal evocation of the individual self that is traced in both novels to a legacy of African diaspora and modernity and post-African diaspora and modernity relations, and specific gendered configurations. The depiction of the brutalized human body serves as a foil for a powerful critique of the post-African diaspora and modernity national body.¹³

The above quote accentuates how African diaspora populations have faced and continue to face various forms of oppressions, and what Silva describes as “semi-ritualistic occasions of domestic violence, of rape and mutilation,”¹⁴ a number of which are represented in these fictional narratives. As Silva's quote above further reveals racial oppression African diaspora and

systemic injustices create double roadblocks for African diaspora communities in the U.S., who Petty Sheila also explains “are cut off from their own cultures by the denial of their birthrights, they were also barred from participating as citizens and equals in their New World context.”¹⁵ Many of these diaspora communities have according to Mazvita Nyahhongo “not been emancipated from various forms of psychological, emotional, physical oppression and sex-role stereotyping.”¹⁶ They continue to face what Sheila describes as masters possessing “total control over every aspect of blacks...including administering corporal punishments by whip and selling them at will.”¹⁷

However, despite the commendable efforts by African diaspora writers in order to better understand African dreams of America and the complexity of diaspora experience, relatively little research has been done on these communities in the U.S.’ their struggle to achieve the African dream of Americas, the impacts of modernity, racism and structural injustices on these African diasporic populations in America. Although there exist a number of studies that recognize the significant increase in African diaspora populations to the U.S., but very little studies have been done on the complexity of diaspora experience in the country. Furthermore, there exist a number of studies on diaspora experience and struggle to achieve the American dreams¹⁸ but only a small number of these writings have specifically explored the relationship between African diaspora, African dreams of America, race, and African diaspora and modernity in diasporic fictional narratives.

In consideration of these questions, this dissertation uses African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience. It also argues that African fictional narratives have a particular role to play in contesting and reworking not only race, the American dreams but capitalism, African diaspora and modernity in the U.S. Drawing on fictional

narratives by these African writers, this study explores the complexities of fiction invitation to imagine immigration, race, African diaspora and modernity in the U.S., exploring fictions ability to do justice to the experiences of African diaspora in extraordinarily rich and insightful ways, shedding light on African diaspora populations struggle to achieve the African dreams of America.

Statistics and Social Science Research: African Dreams of America

Immigration has been a major theme in African literature since the 1960s and 1970s, when thousands of Africans began leaving their homelands and immigrating to other countries for better opportunities, especially to the United States and the United Kingdom. Sam Roberts, in the February 21, 2005, issue of *The New York Times*, argues that “the recent arrivals from Africa accounted for about 25 percent of black population growth in the United States overall during the decade. Nationally, the proportion of blacks who are foreign-born rose to about 7.3 percent from 4.9 percent in the 1990s.”¹⁹ As the population of this group of diaspora populations grows, they continue to face a series of adjustments and survival difficulties.

Meanwhile, the question of African dreams of America has been a major issue in research, in particular in African literature in the last few decades. Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* (1983) and Ama Ata Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1964) are two of the Anglophone African novels to explore African diaspora experiences and African dreams of America in and outside of their homelands in Africa. Emecheta’s novel is set in the United Kingdom while *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is set in Ghana and the United States. One of the most important characteristics of these African novels is that they are transnational projects designed to unmask the performance and construction of African diaspora experience. The African novels

I will explore in this study are necessary responses to the realization that African diaspora communities in the U.S.' communities are being discriminated against, disdained and victimized in their new "homes." African diaspora communities in the U.S. are oppressed in this manner as a result of circumstances, some of which may be related to their racial backgrounds, economic and social circumstances and cultural affiliations.

Commenting on the U.S. immigration policy, Sub-Saharan African diaspora communities in the U.S.' experience, the frustrations and predicaments they endure, their assimilation and integration into mainstream American society, Jesse Potter in his book *Sub-Saharan African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the United States: A Narrative Inquiry of the Assimilation Experiences into Mainstream American Society* argues that:

Precedents show that immigrants who are racially and ethnically different from the majority population, like the Sub-Saharan African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the United States, face challenges to integration. The fact that immigrants from sub-Saharan African are no longer sojourners as they were before the 1960s, but now constituents of a new African Diaspora, indicate it will not be uncommon for them to face problems of integration into mainstream American society.

It is against this backdrop that scholars' have continued to research immigrants experience, integration and assimilation in the United States. A number of scholars', including the three scholars whose work I will be exploring have continue to produced literature and embark on research projects to understand immigrants' experiences, integration and assimilation experiences in the United States. These writers continue to investigate these immigrants' communities and how they have cohabited with their host native communities.

Like many other countries, the U.S. is a "nation of immigrants"²⁰ and the African diaspora communities in the U.S. are some of the fastest growing immigrant population in the country. And not only are these group of immigrants making their presence known in America,

but they are also making extraordinary contributions socially, educationally, politically, and economically in their “new home.”²¹ Describing this idea further, John Arthur in his book,

Invisible Sojourner: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States observes that:

The cultural polyphony of Africans has become a noticeable aspect of the urban landscape of major metropolitan centers across the United States. Throughout America, African diaspora communities in the U.S. make significant contributions to the cultural and economic enrichment of this country. Their contributions in the areas of medicine, higher education, and engineering have been chronicled in major newspapers. Largely invisible and unknown to many Americans, these Africans are becoming some of the continent’s most educated and dynamic people.²²

Writing further about the African diaspora’s communities in the U.S. and the significant increase in their population over the past forty years, Arthur points out that thousands of African diaspora communities in the U.S. voluntarily come to the United States to seek a better life for themselves:

Immigrant flow into the United States since 1981 to 1995 has more than doubled. Part of the new global migration of skilled and unskilled people leaving areas of low capital formation and economic development for highly advanced economies, the Africans who have settled in the United States during the last twenty years represent the largest number of Africans in more than two hundred years to settle in America. Between 1974 and 1995 alone, Ethiopian migration to the United States increased from 276 to 5,960 – an increase of over 2,000 percent. The increase in the same period for Nigeria was from 670 in 1974 to 6,818 in 1995 – an increase of over 900 percent.²³

John Arthur is not the only scholar who has written about the significant increase in the population of African to the U.S. In his article, *The New Diaspora-African Immigration to the United States*, April Gordon observes that the massive presence of the African diaspora communities in the U.S. population ‘has changed the characteristics of the immigrant population’²⁴ John Arthur argues further that

The numerical trend of Africans living in the United States has, with some exceptions, been increasing. The 1970 census showed there were about 61, 463 Africans living in the United States. By 1980, their number had increased to 193,723—a threefold increase. The 1990 census counted more than 363, 819 Africans. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of Africans living in the United States increased fivefold, according to the census of the United States 1970-1990. For fiscal year 1995-1996, the number of Africans who were admitted as permanent residents increased by 27 percent (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1993-1996).²⁵

However, he observes that the African diaspora communities in the U.S. were not given much opportunity to immigrate to the United States before the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965. This changes according to Porter:

Largely due to the new immigration policy instituted by the United States Government in 1965. The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 shifted the immigration policy of the United States from the national origin quota system established in the 1920s to a categorical preference system that placed great emphasis on family unification. With this new policy, African diaspora communities in the U.S. who are citizens or legal permanent residents are allowed to bring their immediate relatives and other family members to join them in the US.²⁶

Taken together, the significant increase in the population of African diaspora communities in the U.S. to the United States in recent time both complicates and uncovers the dynamic and significant nature of African immigration to the U.S. Most importantly, the significant increase in the population of African diaspora communities in the U.S., their assimilation and integration experiences in the U.S. provides scholars with the tools they need to understand and explore the performance and construction of immigration in the country and its relationship to race, gender, class, diaspora experience and transnational discourses.

This significant and unprecedented increase in the African diaspora populations in the U.S. has resulted in the emergence of notable African writers, including Chimamanda Adichie,

Ama Ata Aidoo and Teju Cole. These African writers are making sure that the experiences of these immigrants' communities are documented. This has led to several books being published documenting the struggle for adjustments, challenges, accomplishments and other experiences confronting the African diaspora communities. Also, not only are African writers documenting the experiences of the African diaspora communities in the U.S., they are also writing these from African perspectives.

These African diaspora authors write as a means to counteract and improve the badly damaged images of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in literature produced by the west and from western perspectives. They are trying to change these African stories and correct all the damaging stereotypes about African diaspora communities in the U.S. that have circulated in mainstream Western cultures for decades. These African writers are writing to demonstrate the values of the African diaspora populations, their challenges and accomplishments, struggle and survival, triumphs and failures, all in an effort to bring human faces to their struggle and to celebrate these their stories. For instance, a novel such as Adichie's *Americanah* seeks to portray African diaspora experiences in the U.S. through the eyes of a Nigerian woman named Ifemelu and her lover, Obinze that contrast significantly from the stereotypical and hideous representations of Africans by Western writers, including Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary. For instance, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which represent Africans as barbaric and savage, reinforces and maintains the backwardness, inhuman and ferocious nature of Africa.

In addition to these, not only are these African writers exposing the injustices and oppression of African diaspora communities in the U.S., but they are also using their writings as instruments to unmask African diaspora communities' efforts to change their own stories, their own destinies. In other words, they are using their writings to expose the triumphs of these

immigrants against institutional racism, decades of oppressions and humiliations. These African writers are revealing the ways in which African diaspora populations in America are achieving self-actualization in a world that see them as worthless and as second class citizens. Tony Sinoes da Silva argues that African writers such as these are using their writings as tools to expose the brutal nature of racism, African diaspora and modernity, gender discrimination, institutional racism and various other power structures that seem to always ensnare the African diaspora communities in the U.S. Using Adichie's writings as example, Silva states that

Thematically topical and polemic, the writing in both texts is raw and confrontational in its depiction of self in the face of physical pain and psychological distress. Adichie returns the return to an aesthetics of excess firmly grounded on potentially disturbing images of the body in pain...the battered, bruised and scarred body emerges as a key image, a corporeal evocation of the individual self that is traced in both novels to a legacy of African diaspora and modernity and post-African diaspora and modernity relations, and specific gendered configurations. The depiction of the brutalized human body serves as a foil for a powerful critique of the post-African diaspora and modernity national body.²⁷

In this quotes, Silva explains how African diaspora populations, and by extension, the entire African people, have faced and continue to face various forms of subjugations and brutalities and what she describes as "semi-ritualistic occasions of domestic violence, of rape and mutilation,"²⁸ a number of which are represented in these African novels.

In addition to exploring the pain, brutalities and subjugation of African diaspora communities owing to racism and discriminations of many kinds, these African diaspora novels demonstrate how the African diaspora communities in the U.S. are rejecting these oppressions, how they are taking control of their own lives, their own destinies, and challenging the hegemonic structure of power in the country. These texts provide us with the awareness that African diaspora populations are trying to change their predicaments and oppressions to

empowerment through hard work, discipline and rejection of degrading stereotypes imposed upon them. Rather than continue to be victims, these diaspora communities are able to fight and achieve empowerment. Unfortunately, while some African diaspora populations are able to fight their oppressors, many others are unable to do so, as illustrated in the stories of many characters portrayed, including Julius, the protagonists in Adichie's *Americanah*.

Understanding Diaspora Experience

Because African diaspora experience is the nexus of this dissertation, it is significant to provide a background information about it as a means to place it in a proper perspective. The term diaspora means the dispersion and the movement of person (s), group of people away from their ancestral homelands to other locations. Diaspora articulates the movement, cultures, and traditions of this group (s) of people and their descendants to places throughout the world and ends most recently, with scholarship on exile, diaspora and homelands. Diaspora has also been defined in various other ways. Looking at these definitions, one thing stands out and that is the fact that diaspora is about a group of people who are dispersed away from their traditional homelands to new locations. I should also note that diaspora is not just about being dispersed to new locations; it is also about the cultural, political, social and religious practices of this particular group of people in these new locations.

For instance, what are the political, cultural, social and religious practices by blacks in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba? What constitutes diaspora experience? What motivates their practices and beliefs? What role has class, ethnicity, gender, citizenship and race played in notions of return or exile? How do people in the diaspora remake themselves and their new worlds? What are their survival skills and dynamic culture that enabled them to thrive

and spread in their new locations? What motivates their actions and their in-actions in their new home? These and more are the questions that are raised by the concept diaspora. There are many factors that are responsible for people dispersing from one place or places to the other, including slavery, war, religious, racial, political, sexual persecutions, struggle for better lives and adventures.

Scholars have also defined the term “diaspora” in various ways as the movement of people and their descendants to places throughout the world. For instance, Patrick Manning in his book *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture* defines diaspora as “the settlement and community that arises as a result of migration,”²⁹ arguing that the “story of Africa and its diaspora must address debates on the sources of black culture, the magnitude of slave trade, the explanation of racism, the power of imperialism, and interpretations of capitalism and slavery, black nationalism, Christianity and Islam, corruption, black gender politics, and the balance of tradition and African diaspora and modernity.”³⁰

Scholars have continued to expand and theorize on the meaning of diaspora in various ways. In his masterpiece *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Brent Edwards explores the way black life, experience and literary traditions are translated across the globe, the black Francophone and Anglophone worlds, revealing how Paris became a significant point for the development of African Americans internationalism in the Harlem Renaissance and during the World War 2. Edward does a great job exploring the creativity, tensions of ideas and misunderstandings among African American intellectuals, radicals and thinkers, completely changing our perception of the field of African diaspora and African American transnational experiences.

Edward brings a new meaning and understanding to diaspora studies by illuminating the

exchanges between the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude movement, Harlem and Paris, the Caribbean and Africa. Through Edward meticulously researched accounts of various significant contact of differences, exchanges and ideas among black intellectuals transnationally, from the United States, to Africa, to the Caribbean, and in Europe, we are offered a new understanding of black intellectual's cultural and political boundary crossings, revealing a new insight into black internationalism and diaspora modernism.

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Brent Edwards puts these diasporic and transnational experiences of blacks succinctly when he argues that "certain moves, certain arguments and epiphanies can only be staged beyond the confines of the United States." By exploring the literary and intellectual traditions of black transnational culture between the Caribbean, Paris, Africa, Europe and exploring the exchanges of ideas during the Harlem renaissance and of published works, including *Opportunity*, *The*

Negro World, and *The Crisis* and newspapers in Paris such as *Les Continents*, *La Voix des Nègres*, and *L'Etudiant noir*, Edwards succeeds in demonstrating the true meaning of blacks diasporic experiences as not limited to a national boundary but a transnational sites, underscoring the significant contributions of blacks to global modernism and discourses.

Also citing the works of great Black intellectuals, including Alain Locke, René Maran, Claude McKay to Paulette Nardal, W. E. B. Du Bois, George Padmore, and Langston Hughes, Edward shows the divergent ways to imagine race beyond national barriers, revealing the significance of translation and most importantly showing that politics of diaspora that goes beyond a national boundary and important to negotiating difference among populations of people of African descent throughout the world. Using diasporic framework, Edwards explores the rise of black internationalism, explaining “it was an incredibly exciting moment in world politics... with the Russian Revolution and the forming of the League of Nations, Africans and African-Americans began to think that people could come together at a level beyond the nation-state in order to protect human rights and civil liberties on a global scale.” Edward's analysis of the transnational experiences of blacks demonstrates the significance of black's diasporic experiences and underscores its relevance to contemporary thinking about blacks not only in the US but internationally, and most importantly underscoring the significance of blacks to global discourses.

Another important scholar in the field of Diaspora studies is Paul Gilroy, who has demonstrated the importance of Blacks' transnational traditions in his two masterpieces-- *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* and *The Black Atlantic: African diaspora and modernity and Double-Consciousness*. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy does a fantastic job expanding on the meaning of diaspora and theorizing it. *The Black Atlantic: African*

diaspora and modernity and Double Consciousness (1993) is a continuation of Gilroy's theories on diaspora, race, culture and African diaspora and modernity. In the book, Gilroy sets out to deconstruct traditional conception of African diaspora and modernity, by insisting that African diaspora and modernity must be understood through the inclusion of the black Atlantic/ slavery experiences into contemporary thinking. Gilroy devises a theoretical approach to understanding culture, race and racism, as something fluid, intercultural and transnational, arguing that neither is static nor strictly national. Using the Atlantic slave trade as a compass, Gilroy shows the movement of Africans across the Atlantic to Europe and the Americas, and how these movements contribute to black Atlantic experience and cultural formation/transformation.

Gilroy uses the encounters, exchanges and interactions that took place during the Atlantic movement to deconstruct and debunks the notion that there is pure culture and experience. Gilroy references African American intellectuals and artists and their contributions to transnational cultural understanding and African diaspora and modernity. Focusing on the cultural production and intellectual history of these African America intellectuals, including WEB Dubois, Richard Wright, Charles Johnson, David Bradley, Jimmy Hendrix, James Baldwin, James Brown, Percy Mayfield, Frederick Douglas, Toni Morrison, Jubilee Singers and works by European intellectuals like Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilroy argues for a transnational, non-separatist, beyond-boundary approach to understanding cultural interactions and expressions around the world, while also opposing the hegemonic and traditional dichotomy created among cultural constructions, offering instead a kind of cultural hybridity.

Further, Gilroy uses the metaphor of the Black Atlantic as the window for “an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective.”³¹ Because of his believe in the hybridity and

transnationality of culture, Gilroy rejects all forms of “ethnic absolutism,” concepts and dichotomies created between Afro-centrism and Euro-centrism, because not only do they build on cultural divisions, they celebrate Euro-centrism and white supremacy. For this reason, Gilroy proposes a hybridity of both, arguing also for a post national narrative of the black Atlantic experience. Gilroy kicks against ethnic absolutism of cultural construction to offering the metaphor of the Black Atlantic as a space for “transnational cultural construction.” He moves completely away from diasporic cultural construction based on what he calls “cultural insiderism.”¹

According to Gilroy, the concept of the Black Atlantic is to “address the grand consequence of this historical conjunction—the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering.”³² Further moving away from African American cultural production that is limited to national border, Gilroy focuses on the cultural significance of African American travels of European countries and interactions with European intellectuals, retracing the works of African Americans like Richard Wright in Europe, Toni Morrison, Sherley Williams. According to Gilroy, the works of these African American intellectuals have influenced and shaped transnational, cultural, philosophical discourses and African diaspora and modernity.

Gilroy particularly focuses on Richard Wright and his European encounters, explaining how Wright confronted the works of European intellectuals like Frederick Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud to arrive at his own concept of African diaspora and modernity. Gilroy also cites several examples of African Americans artists, who, through their works, expose and portray the horror, terror and experiences of slavery, not only to recover the past, but to vehemently oppose

European and white supremacy over the people of the African diaspora. Using the examples of these African Americans intellectual and artists, Gilroy calls our attention to the contributions of blacks to African diaspora and modernity, arguing that it is only when we acknowledge the “counterculture of African diaspora and modernity produced by black intellectuals and makes some preliminary points about the internality of blacks to the West”³³ can we really understand the contributions of blacks to African diaspora and modernity. Through his construction of black transnational experiences, Gilroy is underscoring black diasporic experiences.

In addition to this, Gilroy argues that black intellectuals and artists use their cultural productions to challenge European belief in reason as opposed to African barbarism, savagery and bestiality. Gilroy argues, for instance, that “the desire to return to slavery and to explore it in imaginative writing has offered Morrison and a number of other contemporary black writers a means to restage confrontations between rational, scientific, and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless, and bestial African slaves.”² In order to debunk and reject the characterization of Africans as uncivilized and savage, Gilroy argues that the experiences of slavery “marks out blacks as the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later.”³⁴ By moving beyond the national boundary, cultural nationalism and European hegemony, Gilroy has shattered traditional understanding of black cultural significance, and opens up a new approach to understanding diaspora, African diaspora and modernity and the Black Atlantic. This approach puts black cultural significance at the center, moving away from traditionally constructed images of blacks as savage, barbaric and inferior.

Another important issue Gilroy raises in *The Black Atlantic* is the notion of master-slave dialectic proposed by Friedrich Hegel, a European thinker. Unlike Hegel who sees the process of civilization in the master-slave relationship, Gilroy uses the life and travel of Frederick Douglass to Egypt to refute Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Using Douglass's travel experiences, Gilroy changes the conversation of Hegel dialectic. In his reading of Douglass's narrative, Gilroy argues "it is the slave rather than the master who emerges from Douglass's account possessed of "consciousness that exist for itself," while his master becomes the representative of a "consciousness that is repressed within itself."³⁵ By inverting the dialectic of Hegel, "the relationship between margin and center as it appears within the master discourses of the master race,"³⁶ By this, Gilroy has turned the page and reworked the experiences of slavery and captivity of blacks, to that of emancipation and freedom.

By also referencing Douglass's journey to Egypt, Gilroy has succeeded in inverting the conversation on African diaspora and modernity and civilization as emerging from Greece rather than Africa. Further emphasizing the significance of Egypt to African diaspora and modernity, Gilroy argues that "it is obvious that the appeal of Egypt as evidence of the greatness of the pre-slave African cultures, like the enduring symbol that Egypt supplies for black Atlantic responses to African diaspora and modernity. At the very least, it helped to ground the cultural norms of diaspora politics outside the pathway marked out by the West's own progress from barbarism to civilization and to show that the path began in Africa rather than Greece." Gilroy uses Hegel dialectic as a window to place subaltern (African American experiences/black Atlantic) at the center. Gilroy's focus on Egypt is also to remove Europe as the center of civilization and human consciousness, and locate Africa at the center of African diaspora and modernity. By reworking Hegel's dialectic and also referencing of Douglass's Egyptian encounter, Gilroy has placed the

black diasporic experiences at the center and provided an avenue to “locate the diaspora’s critique of Enlightenment universals outside the philosophical repertoire of the West.”³⁷

Also central to Gilroy’s argument about the African diasporic experiences is the role of music in African American cultural formation and transformation. In chapter three of *The Black Atlantic* (“Jewels Brought from Bondage”: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity”), Gilroy focuses extensively on African American musical performances, arguing that not only are African American musical production a site for African American cultural formation/transformation, but also it is a site for cultural debates about African diaspora and modernity. According to Gilroy, black music is not only an expression of a direct image of the slaves’ will, but also a window to change behavior about traditional language and textuality. Gilroy argues that to challenge conventional ideas of African diaspora and modernity and popular consciousness, black artists resort to music as a strategy to reject white hegemony and European high culture. Black music for Gilroy therefore is used “to challenge the privileged conceptions of both language and writing as preeminent expressions of human consciousness.”³⁸ By underscoring the importance of music to black cultural traditions, Gilroy is not only foregrounding the cultural significance of African Americans to global cultures, but he is also putting black experiences at the center of human civilization.

Another important concept in Gilroy’s analysis of black diasporic experience and transnational black African diaspora and modernity in *The Black Atlantic* is his referencing of the sailing ship:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship--- a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion--- is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons... Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the

various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs.³⁹

Gilroy uses the image of the sailing ship as a “chronotopes” to depict the experiences of black diasporic experience, the black Atlantic, and particularly the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The sailing ship gives an image of the middle passage of the slaves from Africa across the Atlantic Ocean, and invokes the idea of transnationality, sailing outside national boundaries. As a metaphor, Gilroy also uses the sailing ship to underscore the circulation of ideas and culture on the Atlantic Ocean, highlighting the significance of the black diaspora. This Black Atlantic experiences, he contends, led to the emergence of African diaspora and modernity, thereby debunking the conventional wisdom, western cultural hegemony and narrow conception of culture as exclusively European. The sailing ship therefore becomes a metaphor for African Americans in their quest for emancipation and freedom, and a space for transnational cultural formation and transformation. By also using the metaphor of the sailing ship, Gilroy has placed black diasporic experience at the center of Western African diaspora and modernity.

Another important argument Gilroy is making in *The Black Atlantic* is the impacts and experiences of slavery itself on African diaspora and modernity. Although Gilroy acknowledges the “terror” and horror of slavery, his argument also suggests that slavery is one of the ways that black transnational experience was created. He posits that it is through transnational slave trade that allowed west to achieve rich economic and cultural hegemony. In other words, Gilroy argues that Western African diaspora and modernity, economic and cultural hegemony was based on black diasporic experience and transnational experience of slavery. This therefore means that the Atlantic slave trade was a space for Europeans to enrich themselves materially. Consequently, Gilroy shows that African American intellectuals and artists have not been passive to

enslavement, but have used the experiences of slavery and music to challenge Western African diaspora and modernity, economic and cultural hegemony.

In all, *The Black Atlantic* is a compelling and important contribution to the study of the Black Atlantic and the black diasporic experiences. The book is no doubt a great and compelling intellectual contribution and a turning point in the study of culture, post nationalism, black Atlantic and the black diasporic experiences as a whole. Gilroy's argument in *The Black Atlantic* also served to indict institutionalized ethnocentrism, whether European or African, and opens our eyes to see far and beyond cultural nationalism/boundary. His breaking away from traditional diasporic study, referencing of African American intellectuals and artists (WEB Dubois, Richard Wright, Charles Johnson, David Bradley, Jimmy Hendrix, James Baldwin, James Brown, Percy Mayfield, Frederick Douglas, Toni Morrison, Jubilee Singers, etc), re-reading their works, providing new meanings to them, and connecting them to European intellectuals (Hegel, Kant and Nietzsche) are no doubt his important methodological contributions to culture and transnational understanding. Furthermore, by placing African American Atlantic and diasporic experiences at the center of African diaspora and modernity, Gilroy has re-written the history of African diaspora and modernity and provides scholars with great opportunity to explore hidden and unexplored histories and cultural expressions around the world.

The five chapters I focus on exemplify a different conversation of the American dreams, in particular the African dreams of America. They focus on both my analysis of these books and these authors' beliefs and attitudes toward America, with particular emphasis on "African diaspora and modernity," African diaspora and modernity in the U.S. and modernity in the country. Chapter One is titled "African diaspora and modernity and African diaspora and modernity Discourses in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*." This chapter demonstrates

that Aidoo's work *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is a post-African diaspora and modernity text. That is, it is a Ghanaian nationalist text designed to not only denounce but destroy African diaspora and modernity and its vestiges in Ghana. Furthermore, not only is *the Dilemma of a Ghost* written to denounce Euro-American African diaspora and modernity oppression in Ghana but it is designed to shed light on the destructive aspects of African diaspora and modernity struggle in the country.

Chapter Two is titled "Racism: The U.S. Reality in *Americanah*." This chapter examines African diaspora communities in the U.S.' experience with racism in the U.S through the eyes of the novel's Ifemelu. Scholars often overlooked racism and the toxic nature of race relationship in the U.S when reading this novel. I will unmask the ways in which the characters portrayed in the novel face African diaspora and modernity and their responses to their challenges. Chapter Three is titled "The (Broken) Promise of American Dreams in *Americanah*." In this chapter, I examine the notion of the American dreams and its disappointing realities for African diaspora communities in the U.S. through the eye of the novel's protagonist, Ifemelu, as portrayed in *Americanah*.

Chapter four is titled "The Other Culprits: *Open City* and *Every Day Is for the Thief*." This chapter explores the devastating impacts of "African diaspora and modernity," oppression and modernity on African diaspora communities in the U.S. and Africans in their native countries. The chapter examines the apparatus that bolster and sustain systemic oppression in both the Nigerian and American societies and the ways in which these characters' deal with their predicaments. Chapter Five is the last chapter and it is titled "Loosing Selfness: The Failure of American dreams in *Open City*." While chapter four explores Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day Is for The Thief*, the apparatus that foster and sustain systemic oppression and the ways in which

the characters respond to them. Chapter Five focuses exclusively on Cole's *Open City* and the disappointing reality of the American dreams for this immigrants' communities. In my analysis of these African novels, I came to the realization that "African diaspora and modernity," African diaspora and modernity and structural injustices are often the major problems confronting these immigrants' communities, preventing them from achieving the American dreams.

Again, in Chapter One, I will examine Ama Ata Aidoo's *the Dilemma of a Ghost* and its relationships to African diaspora and modernity theory, "African diaspora and modernity," race and systemic oppression. I will explore this through the eyes of the text's protagonist, Eulalie and from a transnational perspective. This chapter will explore the tensions that exist between Ghana, represented by Esi, and the U.S., symbolized by Eulalie. The chapter further examines not only Eulalie's disparaging attitudes toward the Ghanaians but also these Ghanaians intolerant and disrespectful treatment of Eulalie. For instance, in the process of defending their culture and tradition against "African diaspora and modernity," and Euro-American influences, which Eulalie represents, the Ghanaian natives marginalized, dehumanized and objectified Eulalie. It is through this tension between Eulalie and the Ghanaian natives that Aidoo's critique of the U.S. and Ghana become apparent.

I should add that even though Aidoo criticizes Euro-American values on the Ghanaian people, she also critiques the Ghanaians for the dehumanizing, intolerant and oppressive manners with which they treat Eulalie, an African-American immigrant to Ghana. The objectifying manners in which Eulalie is treated by these natives demonstrates that while post-colonialism is a powerful tool for the Ghanaians in their fight against systemic oppression, it can also serve as an oppressive tool against the oppressed and marginalized individuals like Eulalie. It is through the critique of racial and colonial oppression, and the American dreams that these African authors

sometimes better understand and critique their native countries. As the relationship between Eulalie and the Ghanaians suggests, Euro-American values and African diaspora and modernity influences continue to be major obstacles to Africa's growth and development, preventing these Africans from truly becoming free and independent people, capable of determining their own future and destiny.

Chapter One

Unmasking Diaspora Experience: African Diasporic Discourses in *the Dilemma of a Ghost*

Do you compare these bastards, these stupid, narrow-minded savages with us?

----- Ama Ata Aidoo *the Dilemma of a Ghost*.

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the “third-world woman” caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development.

-----Gayatri Spivak. *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

I recently had a discussion with my dissertation advisor, Michael Trujillo regarding the Thanksgiving holiday and snail eating in some parts of Africa. During our exchange, I told him that snails are valuable food in many parts of the continent and that it is consumed by rich and famous people because not only are they scarce to find but also because they are expensive. They are, perhaps, analogous to “caviar” for much of America’s elite. Growing up in Nigeria, I saw many rich and famous Nigerians go to joints, cafes and restaurants just to enjoy snails. Despite my desire and hunger for snails back in Nigeria, my parents could not afford them. In fact, one day, because of my appetite for snails, I remember borrowing some money from a friend just to enjoy snail. When I told Professor Trujillo, a Mexican American, about my experience, and the value some Africans place on snails, he said he would much rather eat turkey. He compared the story to his distaste for some of his father’s prized foods like menudo (a stew containing tripe), Cabeza de Oveja (head of sheep), or Lengua (cow tongue). He said that I would be his only Thanksgiving guest who would be pleased by snails. “Please don’t bring snails,” he said only half-jokingly.

Like many Americans I talked to about the significance of snails to some Africans, Professor Trujillo said that he understood that people have different lifestyles and cultures but he found the idea of eating snails to be highly unpleasant. Like many Americans, Eulalie, the protagonist of *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, an American herself, found that the snail, as she was served when she arrived in Ghana, to be very disgusting. In contrast with Trujillo’s polite but

obvious distaste, she completely rejected the snail, even throwing them in the trash just to show her hatred for them and calling them “creepy creatures.”

As an African proud of his people and culture, Eulalie’s behavior angered me when I first read it several decades ago in Africa. She represented and still represents to me a form of American African diaspora and modernity domination. As an African immigrant father of three American-born children, however, I now have some empathy for her as she could be my own child. My anger at Eulalie is now mixed with a degree of understanding as well as disappointment and sadness.

To clarify, every time I prepare African food for my children, they do not want to eat it. Like Eulalie, they put the food in the trash. Rather than appreciate my food, they ask for American food like pizza, bacon, cheese, chicken nuggets, hot dogs, hamburgers and many other options. While I am deeply saddened and frustrated by my children’s refusal, they are also my children and I sympathize with them. Like Eulalie, my children are cultural hybrids, caught between African and American tradition and culture. If they were to migrate to Africa, they would likely be like Eulalie. I suspect they too do not want to eat snails. In this new context, I now view Eulalie, the butt of Aidoo’s play, with ambivalent eyes. She is a force of U.S. African diaspora and modernity domination, capitalism/ “African diaspora and modernity.” She also reveals the problematic, oppressive elements of the Ghanaian African diaspora and modernity, nationalist project. In other words, Eulalie both is incorrect in her behavior and yet has a point.

Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost* centers on many characters, in particular the novel’s protagonists, Eulalie and Ato. Ato was born in Ghana but later travels to the U.S. to acquire education. While in the U.S., Ato met and fell in love with Eulalie, an African-American woman. After completing his Master’s degree, Ato married Eulalie and the two return to Ato’s Ghanaian homeland. In addition to moving to Ghana with Ato in order to enjoy her marital life, Eulalie

also went to Ghana to reconnect with her African roots, and according to Juluette Bartlett-Pack, to “find her historical, psychological, and genealogical past.”⁴⁰

This approach offers a pragmatic framework for understanding and analyzing Ama Ata Aidoo’s extraordinarily complex play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), which can be interpreted as a space upon which Aidoo problematizes issues such as gender, African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/ “African diaspora and modernity,” post-African diaspora and modernity and feminism using the experiences and the perspectives of her characters, in particular Eulalie and Ato.

With this in mind, this chapter accomplishes two goals: first, it will show that the play *The Dilemma of a Ghost* is a post-African diaspora and modernity text, designed to unmask African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of diaspora experience. That is, it is a Ghanaian nationalist text designed to not only accentuate African diasporic experience and experience but to denounce and destroy African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity and their vestiges in Ghana. To illustrate, in a 2005 interview with Anuradha Dingwaney, Aidoo justified her support for the Ghanaian African diaspora and modernity movement and nationalism when she argued

well, nationalism is such a powerful term for us (Africans) because of what we have been through as a people and are still going through. Over the last five hundred years, African people have been under all kinds of onslaught—physical, mental, emotional. It seems to me that whatever is left for us to recoup cannot be done unless we see ourselves as a people, as a nation.⁴¹

This quote once again demonstrates that Aidoo wrote the play as means to reject modernity in Ghana and marginalization of the Ghanaian people.

The second part of the chapter not only engages with but challenges the ideas of post-African diaspora and modernity and nationalism in Ghana, demonstrating that while the text is a

post-African diaspora and modernity and nationalist text, it is also an oppressive piece designed to marginalize the main character, Eulalie. Therefore, this first part of the chapter will also show that while post-African diaspora and modernity and nationalism can be liberating, they come with a cost, especially for women like Eulalie. It will represent a critique of Aidoo's African diaspora and modernity and nationalist ideologies. Hence, the chapter offers a sympathetic reading of Eulalie's struggle and uses that struggle as a means to critically engage Aidoo's African diaspora and modernity project.

Unlike Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Julius in *Open City*, who immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams, Eulalie moves to Ghana in order to achieve the African dreams. In the U.S. where she was born, Eulalie is unable to achieve the American dreams. She is dehumanized and objectified in America because she is black. She immigrates to Africa not only as a means to achieve the African dreams but also to denounce and reject America's negative treatment of black people like herself. In Ghana, one would expect that Eulalie would be treated decently and with respect because she is black like the Ghanaian natives. Unfortunately, Eulalie's racial background does not prevent her from being oppressed, silenced and dehumanized by these Ghanaians.

Immediately upon their arrival in Ghana, Eulalie is subjected to several problems, in particular with Ato's Ghanaian family members. Eulalie's negative experience in Ghana is largely provoked by her presumptuous and disparaging behaviors towards these natives, and also her ignorance and disrespect for Ghanaian values. For example, Eulalie always derides the Ghanaians and their lifestyles by saying that they are "savages" and that she "always understands that there is always witch-hunting out here in Africa."⁴² Not only does the above statement suggest that Eulalie despises the Ghanaian culture but it shows that she does not appreciate it. Furthermore, her

statement that the Ghanaians are “savages” accentuates her conviction that she is superior to these natives.

Using the immigration experiences of both Ato and Eulalie, Aidoo critiques the disappointing reality of both the African and the American dreams, and uses the African dreams of Eulalie and Ato’s African dreams of America to expose the complexity of diaspora experience. Aidoo’s critique of the complexity of diaspora experience is her way of saying that even though post-African diaspora and modernity is a powerful tool in the struggle against African diaspora and modernity, modernity and African diaspora and modernity, it can also serve as weapon to marginalize and dehumanize the helpless and suppressed populations like Eulalie. Furthermore, Aidoo’s critique shows that regardless of where they find themselves, people of African descent are not protected from African diaspora and modernity and modernity.

Ghanaian playwright Ama Ata Aidoo critiques in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* not only the devastating reality of modernity and capitalism on her native country, Ghana but also the negative impacts of the Ghanaian tradition, culture and patriarchal hegemony on the oppressed and marginalized women in the Ghanaian society. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo argues that

African diaspora and modernity imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.⁴³

Employing a African diaspora and modernity approach, not only did Aidoo emphasizes the devastating impacts of Euro-American African diaspora and modernity oppression upon the Ghanaian people but she also accentuates the burden of inequalities that the Ghanaian culture and

tradition place on women like Eulalie. As Patricia McLean, an African-American political activist, argues Aidoo presents “a much-needed glimpse into the world of African women, a harsher one than that of the African male, because a woman is triply marginalized.”⁴⁴ Aidoo employs the tropes of culture, gender, post-African diaspora and modernity and migration to not only portray the aftermaths of African African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity encounters but also to call attention to the destructive effects of oppression not only in Ghana but on the entire African continent. Moreover, and already mentioned, using the experience of Eulalie, her hybrid subject, Aidoo reveals the contradictions of Ghanaian nationalism/post-African diaspora and modernity and African diaspora and modernity.

Historical Contexts to Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost*

In order to better understand the three books I analyze in this study and the authors, it is important to understand the historical contexts within which the three novels are written. Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* was written shortly after Ghanaian independence in 1957. After Ghanaian independence, many people of African ancestry, including those in the diaspora, decide to move to Ghana not only as a means to celebrate the country’s independence but also as a means to reconnect to their ancestral home. Eulalie the protagonist in Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, is one of those people of African descent who travels to Ghana to reconnect with her African roots. As an African-American woman, her travel from the United States to Ghana, exemplifies the experience of many diaspora communities after Ghanaian independence in the 1950s and 60s. These are people who feel oppressed, dehumanized and marginalized in the diaspora. They are victims of African diaspora and modernity and modernity. They feel that by returning “home” they can be celebrated and treated humanely and with respect. Karen Chapman

argues that it is when she is received into the African family that Eulalie “begins, for the first time, to belong somewhere—to find again “mother Nature,” which, in the Western world, was only a voice from the dead.”

Moreover, not only is *The Dilemma of a Ghost* an exploration of the complexity of diaspora experience, as exemplified by the toxic relationships between Eulalia and the Ghanaian natives, but it unmasks the legacies of African diaspora and modernity rule in the Ghana and by extension many Sub-Saharan African countries. In addition to cultural and African diaspora and modernity themes, the play serves to underscore the significant presence of female characters in the male-dominated and patriarchal Ghanaian society and culture.

For example, Eulalie, Esi and many of the female characters portrayed in the play are strong, independent and assertive, representation that are grounded in Aidoo’s feminist background. Unlike in many Sub-Saharan African novels like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizens* (1983), where men are portrayed as strong, courageous and dominant and where women are represented as weak and as second class citizens, women in Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost* are in charge. In other words, they are dominant and central to the play and are in total control not only in numbers but in decision making process. Rather than being silent, they are more assertive and determined, and rather than representing a few number of women characters, women outnumber men characters. To illustrate, women characters like Eulalie attacks and undermine the Ghanaian tradition rather than be subservient to them. She is represented as a bold, courageous and a fearless person, a philosophy obviously grounded in Aidoo’s feminism.

The Dilemma of a Ghost was set against the backdrop of Ghanaian independence, when not only Ghana but many African countries struggled to break away from African diaspora and

modernity oppression. As a writer, ardent feminist and human rights activist, Aidoo was aware of the place of women in many traditional African communities. Using her play as a tool, Aidoo wanted to accentuate the underscore not only the position of women in traditional African societies but also the changing role of women in the post-African diaspora and modernity Africa. Aidoo believes that the role of women should change with the changes happening all over the continent, in particular freedom from African diaspora and modernity oppression. For Aidoo, the liberation of women from patriarchy and male-dominated traditions and cultures are interconnected with the struggle against African diaspora and modernity rule taking place in many African countries. As such, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* reflects these changes that were taking place all over the continent, in particular the struggle against African diaspora and modernity rule and oppression.

Again, the goal of this dissertation is not to explore the African diaspora and modernity aspect of the play. Rather, I am more interested in the complexities of diaspora experience, exacerbated by cultural differences and the uneasiness involved when people of African descent decide to return to their ancestral home lands. In other words, I am not only interested in the impossibility of the American dreams for African diaspora communities in the U.S. , but also in the complexities of diaspora experience. This is exemplified by Eulalie's experience in Ghana. She is an African American woman who decides to travel to Ghana not only as a means to enjoy her marriage with her Ghanaian husband, Ato, but also as a means to reconnect with her African root. In Ghana, Eulalie experiences a myriad of problems settling down among the Ghanaian natives, exacerbated not only by cultural differences but also by Eulalie's condescending and disparaging attitudes toward these Ghanaians and their culture.

Understanding the play

As depicted in the play, Aidoo denounces African diaspora and modernity and “African diaspora and modernity” in Ghana by rejecting Eulalie herself. Aidoo rejects Eulalie primarily because Eulalie epitomizes the U.S. African diaspora and modernity, capitalist/African diaspora and modernity project and as a result is complicit in the U.S. African diaspora and modernity mission in Ghana. I argue that Eulalie while seeking Ghana as a solution also is advancing the U.S. African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity projects, even when she does not realize it. That is to say, Eulalie has more in common with American whites than Africans. My thesis, in essence, is that Eulalie represents the U.S. capitalism/ African diaspora and modernity and the primary aim of capitalism is the destruction of African tradition and culture, which Esi and many of the Ghanaian characters in the play represent. Like capitalism/African diaspora and modernity, Eulalie's presence in Ghana causes the Ghanaian culture and values to fall into pieces. That is, not only did she disparage the Ghanaian lifestyle but she also dishonors the Ghanaians themselves by making condescending remarks such as saying they are "savages," "crude" and "barbaric."

As a result of Eulalie's damaging and condescending attitudes towards the Ghanaians, they are dehumanized, rendered marginalized in their country and their lifestyle completely discredited. In fact, Esi, Ato's mother towards the end of the play denounce Ato's marriage to Eulalie thus demonstrating that my argument is the view of the play's author. For example, rebuking Ato's marriage with Eulalie, Esi argues that “we always hear of other women's sons going to the white men's country. Why should my own go and marry a white woman?” This quote once more suggests that Eulalie possesses certain characteristics that are similar to white American African diaspora and modernityists and capitalists. In other words, Eulalie destroys the

way of life of the Ghanaians the same way capitalism/African diaspora and modernity is damaging the Ghanaian people, their natural and human resources and traditions. Commenting, for instance, on, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity and its calamitous impacts not only on the Ghanaians but people in general, Michel Parenti in his book *Against Empire* argues that capitalism

Systemically accumulates capital through organized exploitation of labor and the penetration of overseas markets. Capitalist imperialism invests in other countries, dominating their economies, cultures, and political life, and integrating their productive structures into an international system of capital accumulation. A central imperative of capitalism is expansion. Investors will not put their money into business ventures unless they can extract more than they invest. Increased earnings come only with growth in the enterprise. The capitalist ceaselessly searches for ways of making more money in order to make still more money. One must always invest to realize profits, gathering as much strength as possible in the face of competing and unpredictable markets.⁴⁵

The above quote suggests that the devastating reality of African diaspora and modernity/capitalism allows for the marginalization and oppression not only of these Ghanaian natives but also of African diaspora communities in the U.S.' community in the U.S. and other racial groups, including white Americans.

Like white American colonialists and capitalists, Eulalie is tenacious in her attempt to not only annihilate the Ghanaian culture but also show that she is superior to it. Some of the ways Eulalie accomplishes her advancement of the U.S. African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity mission in Ghana is by manipulating these Ghanaians, undermining their images, mentally and emotionally exploiting them. For example, when Eulalie arrives in Ghana, she uses the cultural differences that exist between her and the Ghanaians as an excuse to not only exploit them but also to spread the U.S. African diaspora and modernity, capitalism missions, disrespecting the Ghanaians, and undermining their values.

Through her disparaging behaviors towards the Ghanaians, Eulalie distorts their lifestyles, treating them as if they were somehow inferior to her. I should add that Eulalie's American background, her exposure to the U.S. culture, and her embracement of the U.S. values, and capitalism/African diaspora and modernity significantly contribute to her demeaning behavior toward the Ghanaians. Eulalie's discarding of the snails and condescending remarks toward the Ghanaians are indicative of her disregards for Ghanaian culture and lifestyle.

It is significant to note that the snails represent the African culture and tradition. Eulalie's rejection and discarding of these snails, therefore, symbolizes her rejection and annihilation of African values. Furthermore, Eulalie's elimination of Africa culture parallels the American whites' colonization of the African continent. This is because, like the U.S. white African diaspora and modernityists and capitalists, Eulalie tries relentlessly to undermine Ghanaian lifestyle. By denouncing Eulalie, not only is Aidoo rejecting the U.S. African diaspora and modernity and "African diaspora and modernity" which Eulalie represents, but she is also repudiating the U.S. African diaspora and modernity domination and systemic racial order in Ghana, an effort obviously grounded in Aidoo's post-African diaspora and modernity ideology.

The African diaspora and modernity Project:

Grounding my analysis within the play, this section posits that not only does the play reject colonialism and modernity in Ghana but it presents the Ghanaians not as savages and uncivilized people, as they are often represented in popular American narratives, but as intelligent, civilized, resourceful and knowledgeable. It is important to realize that for centuries, Africans and Africa have been negatively represented in European and American popular narratives. For example,

the source of African's inferiority is evident in African diaspora and modernity contexts, films, and African diaspora and modernity narratives about the continent.

As an illustration, on their arrival in Africa for slave trade and commerce activities, European and American African diaspora and modernity powers and authorities built an unequal race representation groundwork to which many Euro-Americans still consent. The racial hierarchy employed by Euro-American popular culture and narratives in their portrayal of the African people today is informed by this notion of racist human evolutionism introduced by the European Enlightenment, which proliferated throughout Africa during slavery and African diaspora and modernity. Such racist attitudes are reflected in the works of David Hume, who asserted that "the negro is naturally inferior to the whites...."⁴⁶

To illustrate, many of the arguments put forward by many European intellectuals and political figures at the time for the occupation of Africa, the domination of the African people, and the advancement of white supremacy in Africa, all rested on biblical justifications, and explained why the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in 1954 stated concerning racial segregation under apartheid in South Africa:

God divided humanity into races, languages and nations. Differences are not only willed by God but are perpetuated by him. Equality between natives, colored and Europeans includes a misappreciation of the fact that God, in His Providence, made people into different races and nations...Far from the word of God encouraging equality, it is an established scriptural principle that in every community ordination there is a fixed relationship between authorities...Those who are culturally and spiritually advanced have a mission to leadership and protection of the less advanced...The natives must be led and formed towards independence so that eventually they will be equal to the Europeans, but each on their own territory and each serving God and their own fatherland.⁴⁷

The above quote once more illustrates that the root of Africa's caliginous stereotyped representation in popular narratives can be traced to centuries of racist and prejudiced ideologies and beliefs widely cherished by many Europeans and American intellectuals and political

establishments at the time. These white American and European men strongly believed that the white race was superior to the black race and that Africans were a barbaric people embedded with all kinds of vices: witchcraft, sorcery, savagery, and corruption. Until today, many Americans continue to perpetuate racist and African diaspora and modernity modes of thinking through their condescending representations about the continent and its people.

This chapter accentuates a Ghanaian nationalist rejection and renunciation not only of African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity and their vestiges in Ghana but it will show that these Ghanaians created an anti-African diaspora and modernist discourse that valorized them as decent, courageous, knowledgeable people who are rich in cultural tradition—the opposite of the savages they are portrayed in popular African diaspora and modernist narrative. But as already alluded to, this focus on Ghanaian cultural tradition comes at a price. In the context of this particular section, that price is paid by the culturally hybrid and women, like Eulalie, who do not fit the appropriate gender roles. They are, thus, rendered bad or unintelligible subjects.

Eulalie Symbolizes Oppression

While living in Ghana, Eulalie is not the typical Ghanaian girl. She is a cultural hybrid, caught between American and Ghanaian cultures. As a result, she is not fully accepted in the U.S. nor does she fully fit into the Ghanaian lifestyle and tradition. In Ghana, she drinks alcohol and smokes cigarettes excessively. She defies authority and disparages Ghanaian tradition. She also does not want to have children and she does not appreciate many of the precious foods served to her by the Ghanaians. While all these activities mentioned are appropriate and allowed in many U.S. societies, the Ghanaian society does not tolerate them. Hence, *The Dilemma of a*

Ghost is a good example of Aidoo's way of negotiating the U.S. and Ghanaian culture and tradition. Although Eulalie fails miserably in these cultural negotiations, Aidoo, nevertheless, helps bring to light the tensions between American and Ghanaian cultures through Eulalie's confrontation with Ghanaian lifestyles and traditions and other immigration experience in Ghana.

One of the most compelling parts in the play is when Eulalie rejects her oppression and denounces the Ghanaian lifestyle is exemplified when she throws in the trash the snail food that was served to her by Esi, Ato's mother. In other words, Eulalie's toxic relationship with her husband's family in Ghana is exacerbated by Eulalie rejecting the valued Ghanaian food that was served to her by Esi. As Ato and Eulalie continue to live together as a family in Ghana, Esi, because of the love and compassion she has for Eulalie, one day brings her some special food containing snails so she can eat. Rather than appreciate Esi's kindness and warmth, Eulalie is shocked by what she calls "creepy creatures."

That is, she believes the snails she is served are disgusting and throws them away. In many parts of Africa, snails are good and valuable foods, and they are foods for the rich and the fortunate. The snail is also the symbol of African pride, culture and tradition. It is because Esi loves and cares for Eulalie that she brings her the snails in the first place. But Eulalie, as she always does, is disparaging and ungrateful, and thinks that Esi brings her the snail in order to poison her. She believes that the snails are harmful to her health and therefore discards them, and by discarding them, Eulalie is once more discarding Ghanaian culture and tradition.

Ato's Ghanaian family continue to believe that Eulalie still has not changed her loathsome and contemptuous attitude toward them. They continue to believe that Eulalie is disrespectful not only for discarding the snails but also for making rude and disparaging statements. They become more irritated. In some African countries, women are expected to take

care of their husbands and their children and prepare the things that their families need, especially food, but Eulalie is doing the exact opposite, which is a major concern for Ato's parents. The most annoying and disrespectful thing Eulalie does to these Ghanaians is putting the snails given to her in the garbage can. It is at this point that everybody in that Ghanaian family, including Ato, believe that Eulalie has completely crossed the line.

Even though Ato, like Eulalie, completely opposes virtually everything that his Ghanaian parents represent, this time he strongly believes that his wife (Eulalie) has committed a terrible misdeed. Ato snarls at Eulalie saying "but how come you throw them away just like that."⁴⁸ Ato's condemnation of Eulalie's behaviors not only underscores the importance of the snail to his Ghanaian family, but it accentuates Eulalie's efforts to destroy the African culture and tradition, which again mirrors the U.S. African diaspora and modernity projects in Africa.

In diametrical opposition to the African diaspora and modernity Eulalie, Monka, represents the group of Ghanaians who protect their culture and civilization at all cost from people (like Eulalie) who are determined to destroy them. In the context of an idealized Ghanaian African diaspora and modernity/nationalist discourse, Monka represents Ghanaians who are not selfish nor narrow-minded, the kinds of Ghanaians who are willing to defend not only their independence, freedom and liberty, but their culture and tradition as a whole. These are the kinds of Ghanaians Thiongo describes as the "patriotic defenders of the fighting cultures of African people."⁴⁹ Hence, the emotional damage and anguish suffered by Ato's Ghanaian family as a result of Eulalie eliminating the precious Ghanaian food they served her becomes emblematic of the racist and African diaspora and modernity struggle of the African people to define itself as an independent continent in the face of an American African diaspora and modernity project, racism and African diaspora and modernity subjugation.

It is important to realize that the American African diaspora and modernity project, which Eulalie represents on this horizon of analysis, has for centuries destroyed the Ghanaian tradition and culture through various means, including institutional racism, African diaspora and modernity and various other hegemonic structures put in place in order to undermine and dismantle Ghanaian values and lifestyle. Commenting, for example, on the destructive consequences of African diaspora and modernity on these oppressed and colonized African countries, Thiongo maintains that Eulalie's presence in African countries like Ghana represents a "systematic suppression of our language and the literature," arguing further that the American African diaspora and modernity project "destroyed that tradition."⁵⁰

Remarking further on the annihilation brought upon the Africans by African diaspora and modernity, Thiongo contends that in Africa African diaspora and modernity "is not a slogan. It is real. It is palpable in content and form and in its methods and effects." Thiongo maintains further that African diaspora and modernity "is the rule of consolidated finance capital and since 1884 this monopolistic parasitic capital has affected and continues to affect the lives even of the peasants in the remotest corners of our countries."⁵¹ By explicating the destructions and tragedies brought upon Africa and the Africans by the U.S. African diaspora and modernity project, Thiongo opens a new space that allows us to see its destructive consequences and ramifications for Africa and its people.

Eulalie as an Agent of the U.S. Colonial Project and "Modernity"

Another major conflict in the play revolves around Eulalie and the Ghanaians, and Eulalie's decision to postpone having children until she is ready to have them. For many years after their marriage, Ato and Eulalie, refuse to have children, which is contrary to many African

traditions and the Aidoo's emergent African diaspora and modernity/nationalist discourse of appropriate Ghanaian women. While Ato's Ghanaian family strongly believe that marriage is about reproducing the younger generations, Eulalie completely rejects this notion, further creating cultural tensions between her and these Ghanaians.

Specifically, in many African societies, married women are usually expected to have children immediately following their marriages. For Eulalie, however, this is not the case and Ato's Ghanaian family are extremely worried and concerned that she refuses to give them grandchildren. Meanwhile, throughout this process, this Ghanaian family is under the impression that Eulalie is having difficulties in childbearing when they see no signs of pregnancy several months after their marriage.

Nana, Ato's grandmother, who is already very old, wants to see Ato's children before she dies. The same goes for other members of this traditional Ghanaian family. However, it soon becomes obvious to them that Eulalie is not ready for this important task, and Ato's family does not understand why. They are dumfounded and bewildered by Eulalie's refusal to have children following her marriage. For Eulalie, child bearing does not seem to be her priority. For these Ghanaians, this is the most important duty Eulalie must undergo as a married woman. Eulalie's refusal to have children not only demonstrates that she does not appreciate nor respect African culture, but it shows that she considers herself superior to these Ghanaians. Because Ato is in love with Eulalie and because of his inability to see the consequences of their actions, he tells Eulalie that their not having babies "won't matter at all":

Lalie, don't you believe me when I tell you it's O.K.? I love you, Eulalie, and that's what matters. Your own sweet self should be O.K. for any guy. And how can a first-born child be difficult to please? Children, who wants them? In fact, they will make me jealous. I couldn't bear seeing you love someone else better than you do me. Not yet, darling, and not even my own children. Aren't you the sweetest and loveliest

thing in Africa and America rolled together? My darling, we are going to create a paradise, with or without children.⁵²

It is Eulalie's refusal to have babies that makes Lyn Innes to argue that

for them, and for Ato's family, the fact that Eulalie and Ato have *chosen* to remain childless is incomprehensible. It is a choice which, as in Armah's *Fragments*, is linked to materialism and western individualism as opposed to commitment to family and community, and to the view of marriage as a continuation of romance rather than as the continuation of family.⁵³

Innes' analysis above reinforces the idea that Ato and his wife are more concerned about material things than having children. Given this emphasis, the concepts of marriage and child bearing come together to indicate Eulalie's disdain and subversion of African culture and traditions, once more suggesting that she is in favor of the America African diaspora and modernity projects and its expansion in Ghana.

The attempt to perform some traditional rituals, which these Ghanaians believe could aid Eulalie in giving birth, fails miserably because Eulalie will not participate. Rather than take part in this Ghanaian ritual, Eulalie tells Ato that the entire process is "witch-hunting...and absurd."⁵⁴ Because they continue to see no signs of Eulalie's pregnancy, these Ghanaian natives led by Ato's mother, Esi decide to perform African rituals which in many African society is seen as a countermeasure to her barrenness.

The Ghanaians suspect that Eulalie's rebellious behaviors, such as smoking and drinking liquor, may have contributed to her childlessness. On many occasions, Nana, Ato's grandmother, who is about to go meet her ancestors suggests that Eulalie sees a traditional doctor in Ghana in order to fix her bareness since modern medicine could not help her. Eulalie, who is extremely adamant and obscene, saying 'I was born to speak—like an American,' refuses to comply with

the old woman's advice. Extremely worried and concerned by Eulalie's refusal to have children, Nana argues:

I notice you do not feel clear in your own inside. You people always say I talk too much. So I try not to put my tongue in your affairs. But I hope you would think of what I always say. Have we not had enough of the white man's medicine? Since they do not seem to do anything for your wife, why do you not take her to Kofikrom? The herbalist there is famous...⁵⁵

The above quote not only suggests that Nana wants to see and embrace her grandchild before she dies but it shows that this traditional Ghanaian family cherishes family continuity. Nana's statement that "have we not had enough of the white man's medicine" suggests that Eulalie has tried modern (American) medicine many times but it is not working. This also signifies that modern medicine is neither potent nor valuable, an obvious indictment and attack on American power, culture, lifestyles and civilizations.

Consistently pressured to undergo the traditional children-bearing rituals, Eulalie goes ballistic and will not be part any of it. She despises her husband's family's constantly intervening in their marriage. She also does not want them to question her nor raise the idea of her having children. Expressing her frustrations, Eulalie grumbles: "Ain't I poorer here as I would ave been in New York City?" In a condescending imitation of her husband's statement that Eulalie should stop smoking so she may be able to have children, Eulalie confronts Ato saying "my people say it is not good for a woman to take alcohol. Eulalie, my people say they are not pleased to see you smoke...Eulalie, my people say...My people...my people'...I have been drinking in spite of what your people say. Who married me, you or your goddam people?"⁵⁶ Eulalie's rebellious and know-it-all attitudes once more suggests that not only does she believe that she is superior to them but also that these Ghanaian families are ruthless savages who are incapable of making sound and sane judgements. Hence, her contemptuous and egotistic attitude mirrors those of the

U.S. white African diaspora and modernityists, who are bent on undermining and annihilating the Ghanaian lifestyle.

In her efforts to continue to tarnish the African traditions while justifying that she is superior to these Ghanaian natives, Eulalie tells her husband in a frustrating tone when she is told to participate in the African ritual that would help her become pregnant:

And of course, you should have known that. Have they appreciation for anything but their own prehistoric existence? More savage than dinosaurs. With their snail and their portions! You afterwards told me, didn't you that they wanted me to strip before them and have my belly washed? Washed in that filth! [She laughs mirthlessly.] What did you tell them I was before you picked me, a strip-tease? [She sits down again.] Go and weep at the funeral of a guy you never knew. These are the things they know and think are worthwhile.⁵⁷

Responding to Eulalie's derogatory remarks about his Family, Ato tells Eulalie "Look here. I won't have you insult" my family. Rather than stop her offensive remarks, Eulalie posits that "I shall say anything I like. I am right tired. I must always do things to please you and your folks... What about the sort of things I like? Aren't they gotten any meaning on this rotten land"?

The tension between Eulalie and her Ghanaian interlocutors become even more intense and strained when Ato tells Eulalie not to continue to make condescending remarks about his family members, saying "Shut up! How much does the American Negro know?" At this point, Eulalie becomes extremely agitated and upset because Ato references Eulalie's African-American family. As a result, she replies to him "do you compare these bastards, these stupid, narrow-minded savages with us? Do you dare?"⁵⁸ As the above exchanges between Eulalie and Ato demonstrate, not only does Eulalie strongly believe that these Ghanaians are barbaric and savages, but she also accepts that the American civilization and culture (which she represents) is superior to those of the Ghanaians. Furthermore, this statement accentuates Eulalie's efforts to draw a contrast between what she sees as the inhuman and crude African lifestyles and the

sophisticated, refined and civilized American cultures and traditions. By foregrounding Eulalie's negative beliefs about these Ghanaians, the play is establishing a new transnational gaze that places race and African diaspora and modernity at the center of African history, culture and discourses.

Eulalie's profane behaviors towards these Ghanaians once more suggest that she considers herself superior to them. Furthermore, her refusal to have children not only suggests her determination to destroy the family continuity, which is highly cherished among these Ghanaians, but it signifies her effort to annihilate African culture and tradition as a whole. Commenting, for instance, on the American African diaspora and modernity project and its devastating impacts on the colonized and oppressed African natives. Ngugi Wa Thiongo argues that "for African diaspora and modernity this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized."⁵⁹ This quote suggests that Eulalie's mission in Ghana is all about destroying the people's lifestyles and values, which again mirrors the American African diaspora and modernity projects.

Eulalie's refusal to participate in this traditional ritual, despite knowing its significance to these Ghanaians suggests that she is more interested in annihilating the African lifestyles than she is promoting it. Hence, advancing racial superiority and destroying the Ghanaian culture (missions which Eulalie successfully undertakes upon her arrival Ghana) are some of the U.S. African diaspora and modernity projects in Africa. Michael Hunt in his book *Ideology and U.S.*

Foreign Policy comments further on the objectives of the U.S. African diaspora and modernity mission in Africa:

Rather than having to spend long hours trying—perhaps inconclusively—to puzzle out the subtle patterns of other culture, the elite interested in policy had at hand in the hierarchy of race a key to reducing other peoples and nations to readily comprehensible and familiar terms. It required no more than an understanding of easily grasped polarities and superficial characteristics. Races were different and unequal. Some were more civilized or progressive, others were more barbaric or backward. By locating white Americans of old stock among the most advanced peoples, the racial hierarchy had the incidental attraction of flattering that elite's ego and lending credence to that other major pillar of American foreign policy, the commitment to greatness.⁶⁰

Hunt's quote above once more suggests that the American African diaspora and modernity project, which Eulalie symbolizes, is designed as a means to not only promote American racial superiority but also the destruction of African tradition and culture.

Eulalie's contempt for Ghanaian culture continues to be a major headache for the Ghanaians. Commenting, for instance, on Eulalie's unruly behaviors and what these mean not only for Ato's African family but for the African continent as a whole, Asiedu argues that

Eulalie completely misses the point that in Ghanaian custom, it is not two individual who get married, but two families. Ato's marital affairs are thus very much the concern of his family. Eulalie's dreams of Africa and her experience of it are at total variance. Her expectations of the motherland are shown to be oversimplified and idealistic. Her situation is not helped by the fact that her husband lacks the courage to play the role of an effective mediator between her and his people". He does not give her the real picture, even when she, in the prologue to the play, questions him about the acceptability of their plan to postpone having children...he becomes the ghost in the song caught between Elmina and Cape Coast, not knowing in which direction to turn and unable to find a convenient middle way.⁶¹

By foregrounding a cultural and power relationship in which Ato's Ghanaian family are overburdened as a result of Eulalie's contemptuous behaviors, the symbolism presupposes these Ghanaians innocence and kindness, and the Ghanaian society which Chapman describes as "a

human world of natural instinct and fertility.” Eulalie’s disregard for the Ghanaian ways of life suggests that these Ghanaians are commodity for Eulalie’s exploitation and manipulation, hence cautiously conjuring a contemporary parallel with African diaspora and modernity and imperialism.

Eulalie is Complicit in the U.S. African Diaspora and Modernity Project

While it is evident that Eulalie is a victim of Ghanaian tradition and culture in Ghana, she also represents the U.S. African diaspora and modernity mission of capitalism/African diaspora and modernity. That is, she epitomizes the destructive U.S., capitalist project in Ghana. As a result, she should also be partly held responsible for her circumstances in Ghana. For example, Eulalie, who is obviously ignorant of Ghanaian culture, berates the Ghanaian lifestyle. Through her disparaging behaviors towards Ato's Ghanaian family, Eulalie distorts their lifestyle, treating them as if they were somehow inferior to her. In addition to Eulalie, Ato is another character in the play who tries to attenuate the Ghanaian lifestyles. I should add that Eulalie and Ato’s American backgrounds, their exposure to the U.S. civilization and culture, and their embracement of the U.S. values significantly contribute to their demeaning behaviors towards the Ghanaians and their lifestyles.

While these two characters make many efforts (knowingly and unknowingly) to disrupt the Ghanaian lifestyles, and by extension the ways of life of Africa, it is Esi, Ato's mother, the epitome of African culture and tradition, who manages to interrupt their efforts. That is, Esi is the one, who, through her wisdom, patience and compassion, not only extirpate their malignant intentions but tries to teach them about the significance of African values. In other words, Esi teaches Eulalie and Ato that only by embracing African values can they find self-empowerment,

justice, peace, equality and self-fulfillment. Esi's effort to return Eulalie and Ato back to their African history and values is a representation obviously grounded in Aidoo's post-African diaspora and modernity crusades. Furthermore, Esi's attempts to restore Eulalie and Ato back to African tradition accentuates her repudiation of the U.S. civilization and culture. That is, Esi is rejecting the US civilization and culture, which Ato and Eulalie represent, in favor of African culture, history and tradition.

Despite Eulalie's disdainful behaviors toward these Ghanaians and their values, they love and appreciate her. They welcome her with open arms to Ghana, cherish her presence among them, care for her and protect her. As an illustration, Esi, Ato's mother, appreciates Eulalie so much that she often calls her "my daughter." Furthermore, to make sure Eulalie is not having any troubles assimilating into their Ghanaian culture, Esi will always say to her that "if you need anything, you come and tell us or just shout for any of the children." Not only do the above statements suggest that these Ghanaians love and appreciate Eulalie's presence among them but they also show that they want her to live happily in Africa, and in the process eliminate her excruciating experiences with racism and oppression she had experienced in America. Unfortunately, Eulalie does not reciprocate the love and compassion shown to her by these Ghanaian natives. Rather than appreciate them back, she disparages them by calling them "savages...horrid creatures"⁶² and their culture and tradition "an awful mess."⁶³

One of the most compelling issues that occurs in the play is that despite Eulalie's demeaning attacks and narrow-minded attitudes towards these Ghanaians, they did not give up on their ways of life. They remain committed to their culture and tradition regardless of Eulalie's efforts to undermine and dismantle them. Hence, while these Ghanaians are representative of African tradition and culture, Eulalie, represents not only the U.S. civilization but also the U.S.

African diaspora and modernity missions. She is, however, the detritus of that mission itself. That is her impossible condition as an African-American. Commenting on this, Chapman argues that

in America, Eulalie has no family; nor can she find them in Africa. She brings to Africa only her habituations—to cigarettes, Coca-Cola, machines, and wishes... In counterpoint to Eulalie's Americanness are the ways of the African village folk, their rituals and family gatherings, and—even more important in terms of the play—their intimate relationship with their ancestors and their unflinching reverence for children.⁶⁴

Not only does the above quote illustrate the difference existent between the Ghanaians and Eulalie but it accentuates the roles of these Ghanaian natives as agents of life and hope within a vibrant black culture capable of transcending the racist and African diaspora and modernity barriers raised by Eulalie to impede African unity, progress and tranquility.⁶⁵ Eulalie is revolted by Africa and she is its oppressor at the same moment she seeks it for her own fulfilment and looks to it to solve her own problem of (white) American domination.

Using Cultural Differences as a means to promote the U.S. Oppression

One of the play's major theme is that it explores how Eulalie uses the cultural differences that exist between her and the Ghanaians as an excuse to promote the U.S. African diaspora and modernity project. For example, Ghana and the U.S. are two regions with many different cultures, histories and experiences. Many Ghanaian world views are different from American world views. In her introduction to the play, Karen Chapman reinforces these differences when she argues that

The background of the conflict in the play, therefore, is that of opposing cultures or lifestyles: black-American on the one hand, black-African on the other. The experience of a black American is inevitably different from that of an African, despite their common ancestry. In the eyes of many Africans, particularly those in the countryside, black Americans have more in common culturally with white Americans than with Africans.⁶⁶

Thus, a person born and raised in African countries like Ghana, and who later immigrate to the U.S. will inevitably be caught in this dilemma—neither being African nor American. Such a person thinks in both ways and is caught between what Asiedu calls “two culturally opposed worlds.”⁶⁷ Because such a person is neither a complete American nor a full Ghanaian, becoming drowned in the river of experience crisis, and caught in a cultural trap. Furthermore, such a person is caught at the crossroads of cultural complexities. Referring to the opening anecdote of this essay, this African-American experience as described here is similar to that of the hybrid Mexican American border dweller; they speak neither Standard English nor Spanish. Karen Chapman’s analysis of the play not only illustrates the cultural and social ramification of the play, but its universal appeal. As she notes further in her introduction:

The cultural differences between the American black and the African village folk threaten to become irreconcilable. The experience of a black American is inevitably different from that of an African, despite their common ancestry...Miss Aidoo has treated human problems with an understanding unavailable to many dramatist twice her age. There is no romanticizing of negritude or violence. In her writing, none of the tedious, quasi-anthropological, quasi-sociological treatment of Africa’s past (or future) geared naively to attract anti-white audiences. She is soberly aware of human truths. While her play is firmly wedded to the social world it embodies—today’s fragmented Africa—it is always reaching toward something more universal and, as such, beyond the color barrier.⁶⁸

The cultural, social and universal structure and appeal of the play present triumphant philosophy that suggests fictional narratives such as *The Dilemma of a Ghost* are powerful instruments to underscore societal problems, highlight the collision of culture and histories that inform African diaspora communities in the U.S. experiences as a compelling and significant influence in the emergence of the new African and American relationships. These collision of culture help shape

the thematic concerns and narrative strategies in the play. Chapman points this out between the characters:

The plot is, at the bottom, a simple one. Ato Yawson, a young Ghanaian who has been studying in the U.S., returns home with his strong-willed, black American wife from Harlem, Eulalie, whom he has married without forewarning his tradition-conscious family. The cultural differences between the American black and the African village folk threaten to become irreconcilable.⁶⁹

As Chapman's quote above indicates, cultural difference, certainly, can serve as a severe impediment to integration, as the case with Ato's African family and Eulalie demonstrates.

Because of her lack of understanding and appreciation of the Ghanaian culture, Eulalie starts to disparage the Ghanaian lifestyle. A few days after she arrives in Ghana, it becomes clear that Eulalie is ignorant of many of the things going on there and does not want to listen to any instructions. In fact, much of what she learned about Ghana while living in the U.S. was wrong due to her ignorance and arrogance.

For instance, she learns that there is a lot of drumming in Ghana, but anytime she hears people beating the drums she thinks it is witch-hunting. Regarding what she considers savagery of Ghanaian drumming, she tells her husband that "I understand that there is always witch-hunting out here in Africa."⁷⁰ This statement once more suggests that not only is Eulalie ignorant about what the Ghanaian culture is all about but she is also disparaging the people, looking at them as if they are somehow inferior to her. Thus, Eulalie's condescending and arrogant behaviors toward the Ghanaians lifestyles are identical to the mindsets that many European powers and African diaspora and modernity authorities had and continue to have toward Africa and the African people.

Writing, for example, about the destructive impacts of African diaspora and modernity on the lifestyle and culture of colonized African countries like Ghana, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in their book *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* argue that

African diaspora and modernity has never been disinterested even on a cultural level. A sequence in Safi Faye's film *Fadjal* (1979) powerfully evokes the experience of cultural African diaspora and modernity from the standpoint of its victim. The scene shows a village classroom in Senegal, where barefoot pupils recite the phrases of their history lesson: "Louis XIV was the greatest king of France. He is called the Sun King." Faye's film stages the theft and substitution of cultural experience. "Real" history, these people are told, resides in Europe; only Europeans constitute historical subjects living in progressive time.⁷¹

The above quote underscores the devastating reality of African diaspora and modernity not only of Ghana but of the entire African continent. It is these African diaspora and modernity projects illustrated above that Eulalie vehemently advanced while living among these innocent, loving and caring Ghanaians. Hence, Eulalie's promotion of the U.S. African diaspora and modernity values in Ghana indicates that she has more in common with American whites than with the Ghanaians. This, of course, is one of the greatest ironies of the play because Eulalie, being a black person herself, is expected to be on the side of the Ghanaians. Sadly, she took the side of the white American African diaspora and modernityists, advancing their missions in Ghana through manipulation, bullying and exploitation.

Based on her erroneous views about the Ghanaians, it becomes increasingly clear that Eulalie misconstrues virtually everything going on around her in Ghana, further revealing her ignorance and arrogance about the region and its people. For instance, she has heard Americans talk about witch hunting in Africa, but she does not understand what witch-hunting really means, and when Esi, Ato's mother, and the uneducated mother of an older generation, tries to explain things to her, Eulalie goes ballistic, berates them and calls them demeaning names. One

compelling evidence of Eulalie's disparaging attitude occurs when she condescendingly refers to her husband, who is a Ghanaian, as "a native boy."

Whenever Ato's Ghanaian family bring her food to eat, Eulalie calls the food "horrid creatures...nonsense, rubbish...and an awful mess." Not only do these examples indicate the cultural differences that occur between Eulalie and the Ghanaians but it validates my argument that Eulalie has more in common with white American African diaspora and modernityists than with Africans. These examples suggest that Eulalie considers herself superior to the Ghanaians, a belief obviously grounded in her Americanness.

Furthermore, Esi is not the only character in the play who tries to educate Eulalie about the African culture and tradition. Ato consistently attempts to correct some of her misconceptions regarding witch-hunting and drumming in Ghana, but she is not having any of it, making Ato to chastise Eulalie for her ignorance and rebellious behaviors. As a result, Ato scolds her saying "Don't be absurd, darling. But I thought that one thing which attracted you about Africa was that there is a lot of drumming here."⁷² Ato's chastening of Eulalie not only suggests that he (Ato) completely disagrees with Eulalie's perspectives about Ghanaian culture but it demonstrates Eulalie's conviction that she is superior to these Ghanaians. Despite these Ghanaians efforts to stop Eulalie's derisive attitudes, she continues to undermine them, demonstrating, once more, that Eulalie considers herself superior to them. Hence, the above analysis not only suggests that Eulalie is advancing the U.S. African diaspora and modernity project in Ghana but it indicates that she has more in common with white Americans than with the Ghanaians.

Eulalie's contemptuous attitude toward Ghanaian culture signifies that she completely believes that the U.S. civilization, which she represents, is superior to that of the Ghanaians, making Shohat and Stam to once again argue that

African diaspora and modernity exalted European culture and defamed indigenous culture. The religions of the colonized were institutionally denounced as superstitious and devil worship...African diaspora and modernity institutions attempted to delude peoples of the richly textured cultural attributes that shaped communal experience and belonging, leaving a legacy of both trauma and resistance.⁷³

By providing insights into the workings and dynamics of African diaspora and modernity, Shohat and Stam reveal its destructives and agonizing consequences on the colonized and oppressed Ghanaians, suggesting that the African people have always been perceived as inferior to white America African diaspora and modernityists which again, Eulalie represents.

Engaging African Diaspora and Modernity and African Feminism:

Karen Chapman and other US-based critics are not the only ones to notice the impossibility of Eulalie's position or the position of the marginal figures she stands for. In other words, even though post-African diaspora and modernity and nationalism are enviable and inspiring, they can also be oppressive, preventing some from achieving their potentials in life. Eulalie stands in, in my analysis, for those rendered inappropriate by the Ghana's liberating, idealized visions of itself. As portrayed in the text, while the Ghanaians are trying to fight the scourge of African diaspora and modernity on their soil, they are also oppressing and marginalizing Eulalie not only because she is an African-American but also because she is a "bad" woman. She does not fit within the emergent Ghanaian nation.

Eulalie's marriage with Ato and her immigration experience to Ghana, which she anticipates would be blissful and heavenly, turn into complete frustration and alienation. Commenting, for instance, on the miserable nature of Eulalie's journey to Ghana, Bartlett-Pack argues that Eulalie immigrates to Ghana "to attempt to heal on an individual level what the Middle Passage induced: male familial apathy and abandonment, which on a larger scale is indicative of many black American families. Her journey to wholeness from feelings of alienation is fraught with conflicts, crises, and obstacles that are ultimately overcome as a new hybrid experience evolves simultaneously while family healing and reunification occur."⁷⁴

One of Aidoo's objectives in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, therefore, is not only to bring attention to the oppression of women in the Ghanaian society but also to attack traditional Ghanaian family in her depiction of Eulalie and many other women in traditional Ghanaian society. First, unlike Esi, Ato's mother, who is portrayed as a proud symbol of Ghanaian culture and tradition, and who Osita C Ezewanebe describes as "a proud exemplar of traditional womanhood,"⁷⁵ Eulalie does not appreciate nor respect Ghanaian tradition and culture when she arrives there. As a matter of fact, he disparages them, thereby defying the status quo and challenging the Ghanaian patriarchal hegemony.

And unlike Eulalie, Esi defends the Ghanaian lifestyle, making sure the tradition is not attacked nor challenged. Describing such 'obedient' African women like Esi and their efforts to protect the Ghanaian culture at all cost, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, a Nigerian feminist, describes such women as "the married women incorporated: women who are afraid to upset the status quo, who want security through men, who cling to the vanishing respectability of being married and of having children."⁷⁶

Like Aidoo, Efua Sutherland is another Ghanaian feminist who objects to Ghanaian notions of proper gender role. In her short play *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Sutherland not only brings to light the negative impacts of Ghanaian culture, tradition and patriarchy hegemony on women but she challenges gender oppression and marginalization of women in traditional Ghanaian society. In other words, the relation of Ghanaian feminists like Aidoo and Sutherland to traditional Ghanaian culture is that they believe it is oppressive to women and therefore must be changed or destroyed. That is, the Ghanaian feminists strongly believe that patriarchal hegemony leads to gender inequality in Ghana, preventing many women from reaching their potentials. These African feminists also believe that through their writings not only can they bring attention to these problems but they can destroy and overcome them.

Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* not only illuminates the plights of women in Ghanaian society but it shows that gender oppression has eaten deep into the fabric of the Ghanaian society. In the play, Mr. George Ananse, whose primary duty and responsibility is to protect and educate his daughter Anansewa, decides to exploit the young girl by auctioning her into marriage. It is the responsibility of every parent to cherish and care for their daughters, educate them and prepare them for a better future. Sadly, Mr. George Ananse does the opposite by selling their daughter off in marriage—a crude and pathetic effort to dispose of the innocent girl simply because of her gender. Astounded by her father's effort to sell her off into marriage, Anansewa says ...Oh, my father is selling me, he is selling me...I will not let you sell me like some parcel to a customer, I will select my lover myself, I will not take part in any photograph engagement."⁷⁷ By selling off their daughter into marriage and by imposing a man on Anansewa without her permission, Mr. Ananse is essentially treating this innocent girl as if she was a

commodity to be used, exploited, and disposed—a major indictment of the oppressive Ghanaian tradition and culture toward women.

Mr. Anansi's imposition of a man (a bridegroom) on Anansewa without the girl's consent not only shows that he is an irresponsible and abusive father but it brings attention to gender oppression in Ghana and what Bartlett-Pack describes as a "familial apathy and abandonment."⁷⁸ By saying "I will not let you sell me like some parcel to a customer, I will select my lover myself, I will not take part in any photograph engagement," Anansewa, like Eulalie, is not only rejecting and renouncing Ghanaian culture and tradition but she is also questioning the Ghanaian patriarchal hegemony and challenging the status quo, an ideology obviously grounded in Sutherland's feminist movement.

It is important to note that although these Ghanaians are themselves victims of African diaspora and modernity oppression and capitalism/African diaspora and modernity, but that does not prevent them from oppressing Eulalie because she is a woman, demonstrates again that the Ghanaian society portrayed in the text is a patriarchal one. Hence, while the text is a nationalist and post-African diaspora and modernity project designed to denounce African diaspora and modernity in Ghana, it also portrays Eulalie as a victim of Ghanaians African diaspora and modernity movement and nationalism. This, in fact, is one of the ironies of this play.

Ghanaian Nationalism is Oppressive: A Critique of Aidoo:

While living in Ghana, many of the Ghanaian natives do not appreciate nor respect Eulalie's point of view. That is, they impose their harsh and inhuman tradition and lifestyle on her without her consent. In fact, because of their dislike for Eulalie, Petu, one of the elders in Ghana says that Eulalie "has no tribe." Furthermore, on many occasions, they refer to Eulalie as

a white woman because she is from the United States. As an illustration, expressing her frustration with Ato's marriage to Eulalie, Akyere, one of the elders in Ghana, tells Ato that he brings shame and embarrassment to his Ghanaian family by marrying Eulalie: "but we thought that we too have found a treasure at last for our house. What have you done to us, my son? We do not know the ways of the white people. Will not people laugh at us? Expressing their dissatisfaction with their union further, Nana, another elder in Ghana, even goes as far as calling Eulalie "a slave."

Responding to Nana's accusation that Eulalie is a slave, Ato immediately comes to Eulalie's defense saying "she is not a slave. It was her grandfathers and grandmothers who were slaves." Hence, slave as used in this context is synonymous with a person who has no worth, no values, no tribe, no culture, and above all no family. By referring to Eulalie as a slave, these Ghanaians are, in essence, saying that she is a worthless person, who has no tribe nor dignity. All of these examples are indicative of the contempt and lack of respect these Ghanaians have for Eulalie not only because she is an African-American but also because she is a woman.

In addition to the humiliation Eulalie endures at the hands of Ato's Ghanaian family, Eulalie also experiences oppression at the hand of her own husband, Ato. For instance, rather than defend his wife at all times and make sure that his Ghanaian family members do not continue to subject her to gender oppression and humiliation, Ato does the opposite. During an argument with Eulalie, Ato directs disparaging and sexist language towards his wife, portraying her as if Eulalie was somehow inferior to him because she is a woman. It is important to realize that Ato, who himself is a symbol of Ghanaian culture and tradition, makes disparaging remarks towards Eulalie not only to undermine and control her but also as a means to protect and promote the Ghanaian culture and tradition. This exchange between Ato and Eulalie goes as follows:

Eulalie: Graduation! Ah well, that too isn't bad. But who's a graduate? What sort of creature is it? Why should I have supposed that mere graduation is a passport to happiness?

Ato {harshly} if you must know, woman, I think you do get on my nerves. Since you do not think much of a degree, why for heaven's sake did you go in for it?

Eulalie: Don't shout at me, if you please.

Ato: Do keep your mouth shut, if you please.

Eulalie: I suppose African women don't talk?

Ato: How often do you want to drag in about African women? Leave them alone, will you... Ah yes they talk. But Christ, they don't run on in this way. This running-tap drawl gets on my nerves.

Eulalie: What do you mean?

Ato: I mean exactly what I said.

Eulalie: Look here, I don't think that I'll stand by and have you say I am not as good as your folks.

Ato: But what have I said, for goodness sake?

Eulalie: Well, what did you mean by running-tap drawl? I only speak like I was born to speak—like an American!⁷⁹

The above quotation between Ato and Eulalie not only accentuates the damaging impacts of traditional presumptions regarding the responsibility and place of women in the Ghanaian society, and by extension the entire African continent, but it demonstrates the rejection of these African traditional values and beliefs by these women victims. In other words, not only does the above quote underscore the ways in which lifestyle and culture, in particularly patriarchy and sexism, which are deep-rooted in many African societies, can serve to undermine and oppress women but it shows how these oppressed and underrepresented are fighting back with courage, strength and determination.

This quote suggests that being a woman in this patriarchal and male-dominated Ghanaian society can be a major obstacle to women's liberation, freedom and opportunities to fulfil their potentials. To emphasize, in their book, *America on Film*, Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin describe the oppression that women like Eulalie face as "hegemonic patriarchy"⁸⁰ This, in fact, is the kind of oppressive environment Eulalie finds herself in when she travels to Ghana. In that

country, men are afforded special privileges over women. And not only do men dictate Ghanaian tradition, they also control the women as to what they should and should not do.

Commenting on the condition of women like Eulalie and their experiences with gender oppression in African countries like Ghana, Osita Ezewanebe argues that “womanhood is tied to morality, childbearing and child-rearing, complete dependence both sexually and financially, lack of ambition, and obedience... a ‘complete woman’ is one who possesses these qualities and has attained the peak of womanhood—motherhood through marriage and childbearing.”⁸¹ Ezewanebe’s quotes not only underscore the negative impacts of women’s oppression in Ghana caused by patriarchal hegemony but it demonstrates that this problem has eaten deep into the fabric of the Ghanaian society.

While living in Ghana, Ato’s Ghanaian family members insist Eulalie must have babies according to Ghanaian culture and tradition regardless of what Eulalie thinks or believes. Nana, one of the elders in Ghana, insists Eulalie must participate in a Ghanaian traditional ritual that would aid Eulalie in having babies when they notice that Eulalie is not pregnant several months after marriage. Commenting on this kind of environment and tradition in which Eulalie finds herself in Ghana, Benshoff and Griffin argue that for women such as Eulalie,

it was expected that she would not work outside the home...her most important task was to produce and raise children...she would be assumed to be a virgin when she married, and it was taboo even to suggest that she might have sexual interests or desires. Sex for procreation was her duty, not her pleasure. Her lord and master was her husband and she had little chance of removing herself from that situation should it turn violent or abusive.⁸²

As the above quote demonstrates, not only is Eulalie a victim of tradition, culture and hegemonic patriarchy but she is also underrepresented in the Ghanaian society as a whole. Furthermore, according to Benshoff and Griffin, “a fundamental ideological tenet of patriarchy is that men and masculinity are privileged over women and femininity.”⁸³ This, once more, is the reality that

Eulalie was subjected to in Ghana primarily because she is a woman, demonstrating that she faced a great deal of discrimination based upon her gender. The oppressive and humiliating experiences that she encountered in Ghana because she is a woman provide ample evidence of how hegemonic notions of gender were negotiated and reinforced⁸⁴ not only in Ghana but also in Africa as a whole.

Despite her predicaments, Eulalie is able to remain strong. Her ability to overcome oppression signifies her courage and strength in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. When Eulalie travels to Ghana to settle down with her husband, Ato, and reconnect with her African root, she is subjugated and subjected to gender discrimination and oppression. She is marginalized and dehumanized not only because she is an African-American but also because she is a woman. In the end, she comes out strong, unperturbed and determined to face life with strength and courage, demonstrating Aidoo's feminist ideology.

In many African societies like Ghana, having children after marriage is considered a priority and a significant step in a relationship. These Ghanaians appreciate children primarily because of family continuity. Unlike in some American families, where having children is not a priority, many Ghanaians believe that once a couple is married, the next step in their relationship is to have children. For example, this explains why Petu, one of the elders in Ato's Ghanaian family, argues that "when two people marry, everyone expects them to have children, for men and women marry because they want children."⁸⁵

Rather than pay attention and abide by Ghanaian traditions and cultures, Eulalie defies them. She becomes rebellious, independent, somewhat arrogant, highly opinionated, and does not respect authority nor the Ghanaian lifestyle. In a positive reframing, she is a rebel that defies the status quo that privileges notions of family that are clearly heteronormative. While living

among the Ghanaians, Eulalie's perspective and lifestyle continue to lead to tension and conflict. Eulalie's constant objection and refusal to obey Ghanaian tradition and culture and her nonstop argument with Ato and his Ghanaian family signify that she will not get along with these Ghanaian natives. In this new reframing she can be understood as a sort of hero.

Commenting on the circumstances of oppressed women like Eulalie, Gayatri Spivak, a subaltern studies theorist, argues that "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development."⁸⁶ By invoking such images, Spivak demonstrates that not only are many women in many African societies like Ghana victims of gender oppression and patriarchy, but she is suggesting that these women are casualties of a traditional culture and values system that oppress and undervalue them and their labor as a commodity to be abused and manipulated.

Despite her circumstances, in particular her experience with gender discrimination and oppression in Ghana, Eulalie fights back against her oppressors and does not allow her negative treatments to define her. That is, rather than allow these traditional Ghanaian natives to oppress and marginalize her, Eulalie renounces and fights the Ghanaian traditional lifestyle, which are often detrimental to women like her, preventing them from achieving happiness and living fulfilling lives. By fighting back and resisting oppression, Eulalie is saying, in effect, that she will not be defined by the brutal and inhuman Ghanaian tradition and culture represented by many of the natives. By defying Ghanaian culture and tradition, Eulalie is breaking the status quo where men are highly favored over women, further revealing Eulalie's determination, strength and courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

As noticeable in the above quote, many women in African countries like Ghana are victims of gender inequality, underrepresentation and disparagement. This is exactly the kind of hostile and subjugating environment that Eulalie finds herself while in Ghana. Desperate to see their grandchildren (Ato's children) which is an important part of the Ghanaian tradition, Ato's Ghanaian family insist Eulalie must give them grandchildren. Speaking further to Ato, Petu insists saying "if they do not have children then there is something wrong. You cannot tell us it is nothing. There is no disease in this world but it has a cure. It may cost a great deal, but money is worthless if it is not used to seek for people." This statement by Petu once more underscores the significance children and family continuity to these Ghanaians.

When Eulalie refuses to have kids because she is not ready to have them, these Ghanaians are not happy about it. In other words, they see her defiance as a rejection of their lifestyle and tradition. As a matter of fact, they believe that the only reason Eulalie could not have children is because she has a problem. They also worry that an evil spirit may have struck her and destroyed her womb, preventing her from getting pregnant. Worried that Eulalie might not be able to have children, the elders in Ghana decide that she must be seen by a Ghanaian traditional native doctor, even without Eulalie's permission. Discussing their efforts to rid Eulalie of what they see as her major problem, Petu said to Ato

We were to choose this day because, as you know, on this day we try to drive away all evil spirits, ill luck and unkind feelings which might have invaded our house during the past year. You know also, that we invoke our sacred dead to bring us blessings. Therefore, we are asking you to tell us what is wrong with you and your wife so that first we will wash the stomach with this, then pour the libation to ask the dead to come and remove the spirit of the evil around you and pray them to bring you a child.⁸⁷

Not only does the above quote demonstrate these Ghanaians desperate efforts to make Eulalie have children, but it suggests that they are imposing their will on her regardless of what she

thinks. Moreover, this quote demonstrates that these Ghanaians are oppressive and overbearing toward Eulalie by attempting to force their tradition and culture on her without her consent. The fact that these Ghanaian natives do not seek Eulalie's permission and their efforts to make her have children by all means necessary not only show their desperation but it suggests that they believe they have the authority and the right to oppress and manipulate her. This, again, is indicative of their oppressive and imperious traditional Ghanaian society.

Commenting on the fact that many women in Africa are victims of oppression, tradition and culture, Mazvita Nyanhongo in her essay *Gender Oppression and Possibilities of Empowerment* argues that "a great many African women suffer the triple burden of race, class and gender oppression. These forms of subjugation can relate to one another in different ways. For instance, some women may be oppressed on the grounds of their gender and race; and others as a result of their gender and class."⁸⁸ Thus, not only does Nyanhongo's argument underscore the pervasive nature of gender oppression in Africa but it shows that women are still being underrepresented and marginalized in many parts of the African societies. Ato's statement to Eulalie that "do keep your mouth shut, if you please" shows that Eulalie is a victim of gender oppression and racial discrimination. This statement not only suggests that Ato considers himself superior to Eulalie because he is a man but it shows that gender oppression is still a major obstacle to the majority of African women, preventing them from achieving happiness and inhibiting their opportunities in life.

When Ato scolds Eulalie saying "how often do you want to drag in about African women? Leave them alone, will you...Ah yes they talk. But Christ, they don't run on in this way. This running-tap drawl gets on my nerves," what he is saying, in effect, is that as a woman, Eulalie does not have the right to speak up for herself. Through this statement, Ato is showing that as a man, he

has the right to say whatever he wants, even if it means disparaging and undermining Eulalie because of her gender. By making this statement, Ato is showing that these forms of gender oppression and underrepresentation are deep-rooted in many African societies, considerably sustained by systemic sexism and institutional patriarchy. Through his controlling and sexist behaviors, Ato is not only devaluing Eulalie because she is a woman but he is treating her as if she is in the words of Sheila Petty “a commodity to be exploited.”⁸⁹

While Ato’s statement above indicates his sexism and chauvinism toward her, Eulalie’s response to Ato suggests that she is not going to allow him to dehumanize nor oppress her because she is a woman. To illustrate, Eulalie’s response to Ato when she tells him “don’t shout at me, if you please” accentuates her rejection and repudiation of the traditional African culture and tradition, which Ato represents. Furthermore, Ato’s response to Eulalie saying “if you must know, woman, I think you do get on my nerves” indicates that Ato feels his manhood has been challenged and his ego completely bruised by Eulalie’s statement. Hence, by asking Ato not to “shout at me” Eulalie is once again rejecting African patriarchy and sexism, an ideology obviously grounded in Aidoo’s feminism.

By talking about Eulalie in such degrading manners, Ato is essentially saying that he is superior to her because he is a man. Through the above quote, Ato is not only creating a dichotomy between himself and Eulalie but he is suggesting that the Ghanaian male tradition and patriarchy, which he represents, is superior to Eulalie’s place as a woman. Additionally, by saying “I only speak like I was born to speak—like an American,” Eulalie is basically saying that she will not allow herself to be degraded and oppressed by Ato. Such statement once more underscores Aidoo’s feminist ideology. This is an ideology that is not only grounded on the rejection of sexism

and patriarchy but it is an ideology aimed at empowering women like Eulalie, who face seemingly insurmountable gender oppression in the Ghanaian society.

Eulalie: A Victim of Ghanaian Tradition and Patriarchy

Eulalie encounters several predicaments and impediments from many of Ato's Ghanaian family members. For example, a few days after Eulalie's arrival in Ghana, Monka, Ato's Ghanaian cousin, who obviously dislikes Eulalie not only because she is an African-American but also because she refuses to have a baby, mocks and disparages Eulalie by saying "she is strange, she is unusual. She would have done murder had she been a man. But to prevent such an outrage, they made her a woman! Look at a female!"⁹⁰

Monka does not appreciate Eulalie primarily because she is an African American woman, placing her in the position of a second class citizen in Ghana. Monka's statement that "but to prevent such an outrage, they made her a woman! Look at a female!" is not only condescending, discriminatory, inappropriate and disrespectful but it is also sexist and intolerant. By making such a contemptuous and prejudiced statement, Monka is not only belittling Eulalie but she is also rejecting her. Hence, through these Ghanaians unsympathetic and inhospitable behaviors toward Eulalie, she is denied by prejudice traditional Ghanaian society and by systemic oppression ingrained in a culture that deny her dignity thereby dehumanizing her.

Monka is not the only Ghanaian who is intolerant toward Eulalie. Nana, the oldest woman in Ato's Ghanaian family, due to her prejudice and dislike for Eulalie not only because she is an African-American but also because she refuses to respect their Ghanaian culture, on many occasions treats Eulalie as if she was worthless and insignificant. As a matter of fact, Nana does not appreciate the fact that Ato married Eulalie in the first place. In other words, Nana hates

the idea that Eulalie defies their tradition and culture by not having babies and also by disparaging their lifestyle. Talking to Ato about his decision to marry Eulalie, and her dissatisfaction that with their union, Nana posits that Eulalie “has no tribe. The story you are telling us is too sweet, my grand-child. Since I was born, I have not heard of a human being born out from the womb of a woman who has no tribe. Are there trees which never have any roots?”⁹¹ Hence, the above quote suggests once more that Nana, like many other members of Ato’s Ghanaian family, believe that Eulalie, because of her background as an Africa-American, is an insignificant and worthless person.

These Ghanaians unpleasant attitudes toward Eulalie not only suggest that they are intolerant of her but it also demonstrates that they consider her inferior to them. What this demonstrates is that these Ghanaians (who are themselves victims of racism and African diaspora and modernity oppression) are also racist and intolerant of Eulalie not only because she disregards their Ghanaian lifestyle but also because she does not belong to their Ghanaian tribe. In other words, racism and intolerance as evident in the attitudes of these Ghanaians are not a one-way street. It also accentuates the fact that the Ghanaian’s themselves are oppressive. The lesson here is that the oppressed can also become agents of oppression towards other groups as demonstrated in the manners that the Ghanaians treat Eulalie.

Expressing their disapproval and frustrations of Ato and Eulalie’s marriage, Esi, Ato’s mother tells him that “you have an unkind soul” for marrying Eulalie. These Ghanaians also despise Eulalie because they think she is a white woman simply because she is from the U.S. For example, Esi accuses Ato saying “why should you my own go and marry a white woman... what have you done to us, my son? We do not know the ways of the white people. Will not people laugh at us?” As the above quotes suggest, it is obvious that Ato's Ghanaian family members

dislike Eulalie, have preconceived notions and discriminate against Eulalie primarily because she is an African-American. Hence, their antipathy and prejudice toward Eulalie signifies that they did not fully appreciate her as an individual nor respect her ethnic nor gender background. This also suggest that they did not give her a chance or opportunity to fully integrate into the Ghanaian community because they make it hostile and difficult for her.

In addition to experiencing hostilities and discrimination at the hands of some members of her husband's Ghanaian family, Eulalie is also uninformed and uneducated about Ghanaian lifestyles, cultures and values. These situations significantly shaped and influenced her disparaging behaviors towards these Ghanaians. Eulalie's disrespect and disregard for Ghanaian lifestyle, one would conclude that she is an obnoxious, disrespectful and condescending person. A second look shows that there is more to Eulalie than meets the eye. While it seems obvious that Eulalie has no consideration or appreciation for the Ghanaians and or their cultural traditions, these Ghanaians themselves should be held responsible for pushing Eulalie too far. That is, some of these Ghanaians did not give her the opportunity to fulfil her full potential. Not only did they judge and stereotype her but they also did not consider her perspective or respect her as an individual.

Over and over, these Ghanaians did not listen to Eulalie nor did they appreciate her background, and most importantly, they tried to impose their traditional Ghanaian lifestyles and values on her regardless of what she believes or thinks. One of the compelling evidences in the play that demonstrates this is when Petu, Ato's uncle, plans to force Eulalie to partake in a traditional Ghanaian ritual without Eulalie's consent. Several years after their marriage, Eulalie refuses to have children, and among this traditional Ghanaians, family continuity is important. In

other words, they strongly believe that having children is essential to marriage. As a matter of fact, in many parts of Africa, it is a requirement for every married couple.

Therefore, when Eulalie refuses to have children, Petu, who is desperate to see and hold Eulalie's children, decides to force Eulalie to participate in this traditional Ghanaian ritual. Meanwhile, exasperated and frustrated by their imposition of their Ghanaian culture and tradition on his wife, Ato tells Petu, "Uncle, did you say you are going to use the medicine to wash my wife's stomach." The fact that Petu goes as far as asking Eulalie to participate in this Ghanaian traditional ritual accentuates the importance of children and family continuity to these Ghanaians natives. Furthermore, their decision to force Eulalie to participate in the custom without her permission is indicative of these Ghanaians controlling, overbearing and oppressive behaviors toward her.

With the above in mind, it is proper to argue that these Ghanaians significantly contributed to Eulalie's misfortunes and also her condescending behaviors not only toward them but also their traditions and culture. That is, not only did they denigrate her but they also made Ghana hostile, uncondusive and unlivable for her. Hence, these Ghanaians attitude force Eulalie to behave the way she does. Once more, many of these Ghanaian family members did not appreciate nor value Eulalie because she is African-American and a woman. Their negative attitude toward Eulalie is unfortunate and demonstrates that they are partly to blame for her disrespect and disregard for their culture, lifestyle and values. Therefore, putting all the blame on Eulalie is not only unfair and one-sided but it is completely misguided and unreasonable.

Eulalie's Fight Back against Oppression and Patriarchy:

Once more, it is evident that Eulalie is a victim of gender discrimination and oppression in Ghana. Denied happiness and opportunity to fulfil her potential and forced into a life of hopelessness in Ghana, Eulalie suffers “psychological alienation that eventually leads her to the revelations that, if she wants equality, she will have to fight for it.”⁹²

While it is palpable that Eulalie is a victim of gender oppression, she does not allow herself to be destroyed nor marginalized by it. She stood up for herself, challenging the status quo, while making sure that none of these Ghanaians oppress nor denigrate her. For example, when the elders in Ghana ask her to participate in the traditional Ghanaian ritual designed to make her have babies, Eulalie refuses to participate, defying not only their authority but culture and tradition. Responding to Ato, her husband, who insists his Ghanaian family wants Eulalie to attend the ritual ceremony, Eulalie argues

...have they appreciation for anything but their own prehistoric existence? More savage than dinosaurs. With their snails and their portions! You afterwards told me, didn't you that they wanted me to strip before them and have my belly washed? Washed in that filth? What did you tell them I was before you picked me, a strip tease? Go and weep at the funeral of a guy you never knew. These are the things they know and think are worthwhile.⁹³

By refusing to participate in this Ghanaian ritual, Eulalie is essentially rejecting not only the status quo but also the Ghanaian tradition and culture. Furthermore, through this statement, Eulalie is saying, in effect, that not only is she more civilized and educated than these Ghanaians but she will not allow herself to be used, oppressed and marginalize by them. By denouncing the Ghanaians and their lifestyle, Eulalie is also saying that despite the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal Ghanaian society, she will not allow herself to continue to be a victim of gender discrimination and oppression. Through Eulalie's defiance against the male-dominated Ghanaian culture, Aidoo is once more expressing and advocating for her feminist ideology.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the play works as an intervention, and a welcomed addition to African diaspora experience both in Ghana and in the United States. Moreover, it illuminates the complexities of African diaspora' experiences and experience and the consequences of "African diaspora and modernity" often ignored and made inaudible in immigrants' fictional narratives and discourses. Furthermore, this chapter has sought to explore not only the rejection of African diaspora and modernity oppression and patriarchal norms of the Euro-American male literary canon but it has unmasked the oppressive treatments of subaltern populations, in particular women like Eulalie in traditional Ghanaian society. Through her characters, Aidoo tries to empower the marginalized and dehumanized women in the Ghanaian society. Kempen argues that in their books, Cole, Adichie and Aidoo

attempt to subvert the patriarchal norm of the male literary canon, appropriating and reinventing the writing that has historically excluded them. In a system in which women, especially those of color, have been alluded to as passive, exotic objects—muses, saints and whores—these authors all employ analogous strategies to expose the violence inherent in such system of representation. Moreover, they wield the horrors committed against them and their ethnic and/or gender communities as a type of shield, which resembles the one beholding the image of Medusa's decapitated head, confronting all who knew it with the violence of the viewer's own gaze.⁹⁴

As the above quote demonstrates, these authors use their characters as a means to show how they have "transmuted themselves from object status—enforced linguistically, culturally, ideologically, and in many cases, legally—to regenerating."⁹⁵ For example, while Eulalie is subjected to oppression and hegemonic patriarchy, she did not allow them to define her. In other words, she rejects male domination while fighting the status quo. Eulalie also defies the

Ghanaian lifestyles, which are designed to oppress and marginalize women. In the end, she comes out strong and courageous, a philosophy obviously grounded in Aidoo feminist ideology.

Having gone through many agonizing experiences with oppression and racial discrimination in America, Eulalie decides to “return” to her ancestral home in Ghana as a means to not only reconnect with her African homeland but also to partake in what she considers as the “bliss” in Ghana. For instance, while talking to her husband, Ato, about her hopes, aspirations and expectations going back to Ghana, Eulalie argues:

I’m optimistic, Native Boy. To belong to somewhere again...Sure, this must be bliss...But I will not be poor again, will I? I’ll just be “Sweetie Pie.” Waw! The palm trees, the azure sea, the sun and golden beaches...Ah well, I don’t know the difference, and I don’t care neither. Coconut palms, palms-palms, aren’t they all the same? And anyway, why should I not go and see your folks? And your gods my gods...shall I die where you will die.⁹⁶

As the above quote suggests, Eulalie returns to Ghana represents her efforts to escape her harrowing experiences with racism and oppression in America. Through her play, Aidoo tries to fight African diaspora and modernity in Ghana. In other words, the play is a post-African diaspora and modernity and nationalist project designed to denounce and reject African diaspora and modernity not only in Ghana but in Africa as a whole. For example, upon her arrival in Ghana, Eulalie, who symbolizes American African diaspora and modernity project, tries to annihilate the African tradition and culture by disparaging and undermining them. She declines to participate in an important traditional ritual designed to make her have babies. And every time she is served valuable African food, she discards it. Eulalie also treats these Ghanaians as if they are somehow inferior to her. She disparages them and calls them savages and barbarians.

By rejecting Ghanaian culture, Eulalie is essentially renouncing the African ways of life in general. Hence, the above examples demonstrate Eulalie’s annihilation of African lifestyles,

which are identical to the U.S. African diaspora and modernityists' missions in Africa. While Eulalie attempts to destroy the lifestyle of these Ghanaians, they did not allow her to succeed. Not only did these Ghanaians hold on to their ways of life but they denounce and reject Eulalie, suggesting that these Ghanaians are also rejecting African diaspora and modernity and the U.S. African diaspora and modernity project, which Eulalie represents.

In addition to cultural themes, Aidoo's play also underscores her belief that the U.S. is not a paradise but a deception, and that rather than migrating there in search of the American dreams, these African diaspora communities in the U.S. should stay and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of their respective homelands, a belief obviously grounded in Aidoo's post-African diaspora and modernity ideology. This is underscored by Eulalie's return from the U.S., where she claims she has been discriminated against and treated like a second class citizen because she is black. Once more, this demonstrates that African diaspora communities in the U.S. American dreams is nothing but a deception.

Like millions of other African diaspora communities in America, Ifemelu in *Americanah*, Ato in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Julius in *Open City*, all return to their ancestral home in Africa because their African dream of Americas turn into deception. These immigrants' decision to return to their homelands after many years of disappointing American promises represent these African authors rejection and denouncement of American values and societies, in particular "African diaspora and modernity," African diaspora and modernity and capitalism. These diaspora communities are fooled by situation comedies like *the Bill Cosby show* into coming to American and not until they arrive did they realize that they had been deceived.

In chapter one, I explore the complexities of African diaspora experience in Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. I should mention that Aidoo's play is primarily about diaspora experience.

It also articulates the notion of a return to one's homeland. This is exemplified by Eulalie's journey from America to Ghana in search of freedom, liberty and equality. In the US, Eulalie encounters racism, oppression and systemic injustices. In search of emancipation and self fulfilment, she moves to Ghana. Although, Eulalie believes that her journeys to Ghana would lead to freedom, she is disappointed because the Ghanaian natives did not treat her with respect. Rather than being welcomed, she is treated like a second class citizen. Hence, Eulalie's journey to Ghana represents Aidoo's articulation of diaspora experience and the notion of a return to one's homeland. In the next chapter, I will examine the deleterious effects of modernity and the failure of the American dream for African diaspora communities in the United States in Adichie's *Americanah*. The chapter unmasks the detrimental impacts of racism on these diaspora African populations and uses an African diaspora and modernity platform as a means to reject and denounce them. As Adichie's novel suggests, the African diaspora and modernity that these African diaspora communities face in America is compounded by the devastating reality of alienation, hopelessness, "African diaspora and modernity" and the failure of the American dream. This chapter uncovers the apparatus that fosters and sustains African diaspora and modernity, the way in which these factors are constructed and performed, the institutions that support and strengthen modernity, the ways in which the characters portrayed in the novel respond to these factors, and their efforts to reject them.

Chapter Two.

Complicating Diasporic Experience: Racism and the U.S. Reality in *Americanah*

Racism is a concept and practice of discrimination whereby a particular race assumes a position of superiority when treating the other race as inferior or less human: while this may be understood as common place, it remains a fact that the

most often practice of racism is White superiority where Blackness determines inferiority...⁹⁷

-----Onyeka Iwuchukwu. *Racism and Experience in Onwueme's Riot in Heaven*.

As long as all blacks were represented in demeaning or peripheral roles, it was possible to believe that American racism was, as it were, indiscriminate. The social vision of "Cosby," however, reflecting the miniscule integration of blacks into the upper middle class, reassuringly throws the blame for black poverty back onto the impoverished.

.....Henry Louis Gates. "TV's Black World Turns—But Stays Unreal."

Racism is a concept and practice of discrimination whereby a particular race assumes a position of superiority when treating the other race as inferior or less human: while this may be understood as common place, it remains a fact that the most often practice of racism is White superiority where Blackness determines inferiority...⁹⁸

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In 2009 the Nigerian writer and human rights activist, Chimamanda Adichie delivered a TED talk called "The Danger of a Single Story." It was about the dynamics and complexities of diaspora experiences in the United States and elsewhere in the world, with a particular emphasis on racial intolerant, modernity, and human differences, and how these factors are being exploited as tools to promote and sustain prejudice, inequality, institutional African diaspora and modernity and structural injustices. In Addition to using African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience, this chapter uses Adichie's novel *Americanah* and insights to explore African dreams of America, racial injustices and systemic oppression in the U.S. through the eyes of Ifemelu, Adichie's protagonist in the novel. I examine these diaspora communities' African dreams of America and systemic injustice they face in the process of assimilating to American society.

Americanah centers on many characters, in particular Ifemelu and Obinze, the novel's protagonist. These characters are Nigerian immigrants struggling to achieve the African dreams of

America but face several obstacles along the way. Not only are these characters subjected to African diaspora and modernity, modernity and institutional racism but they are marginalized and silenced by structural injustices and hegemonic structure of power. The story takes place over a period of fifteen years and focuses on these characters' journey to achieve the African dreams of America, their life aspirations and goals, the failures and disappointment they face both in their home country, Nigeria and in the U.S. as immigrants. The novel's protagonist, Ifemelu was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. In Lagos, Ifemelu attended a university and was also able to attend an American university, Wilson College in Philadelphia on a scholarship.

With this background in mind, this chapter accomplishes two goals. First, it uses the African dreams of these characters as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience. Secondly, it argues that characters like Ifemelu and Obinze are victims of African diaspora and modernity, institutional racism and structural injustices. The chapter posits that these factors are preventing these immigrants from achieving their African dreams of America. The chapter further demonstrates how despite these immigrants' determination to achieve the African dream of Americas, they are met with alienation and hopelessness, exacerbated by the devastating reality of racial oppressions, systemic injustices, global modernity and colonial subjugation.

I argue that these immigrants racial background (blackness) is a major factor in the prejudiced and disparaging manners they are treated in America. I analyze Adichie's novel as a way to unmask the relationship between African diaspora and modernity and the African dream of Americas and the workings of racism that Adichie wants to expose in her work. The chapter demonstrates the ways in which living in the U.S. as an immigrants preclude them from the promise of the American dreams. In unmasking the racism that these immigrants' communities

face, Adichie allows us to see how racism, systemic oppression, “African diaspora and modernity,” and failure of the American dreams are connected to larger structural issues of economic and social justice that Adichie attempted to uncover and complicate.

I then move on to an examination of these African diaspora communities’ responses to their predicaments living in America. For instance, as a means to empower herself and reject America’s systemic racial order and structural oppression, Ifemelu returns to her home country in Nigeria. This explains why Adichie argues that “the novel is about leaving home as much as it is about going back home.”⁹⁹ Ultimately, Ifemelu’s return to Nigeria illustrates her rejection of Euro-American values, global modernity, capitalism and institutional racism. The chapter pay particular attention to how African diaspora and modernity and modernity worked to alienation and exclude these diaspora communities, preventing them from achieving the American dreams.

Americanah explores the complexities of race and immigration in the U.S., underscoring not only the pervasive nature of racism, but the complex nature of the U.S. immigration system. The novel’s protagonist, Ifemelu, becomes successful and ultimately achieves many of the promises of the American dreams but she also runs into a gauntlet of a racist society that is also an American deception. To effectively drive home her points, Adichie goes from country to country, from the United Kingdom to Nigeria, from Belgium to France, from the United States back to Africa. In the end, Adichie tells a compelling and penetrating story that forces us to reexamine our beliefs regarding race and immigration in the U.S. Similarly, not only did Adichie question American ideals, but she reveals the predicaments African diaspora communities in the U.S. seeking a better future in the U.S. face.

Using the experiences of the novel’s protagonist Ifemelu, her boyfriend, Obinze, and many characters in the novel, and their challenges as they struggle to achieve the American

dreams as backdrops, Adichie questions and complicates not only race relations between whites and African diaspora communities in the U.S. but the ideals of the American society. The novel takes us through Ifemelu's childhood in her native country in Nigeria, her travel to the U.S. to attend Princeton University in the U.S., her struggle with African diaspora and modernity, her achievement as a successful blogger, and her eventual return to Nigeria after living in the U.S. for 13 years.

The novel is a pragmatic depiction of African diaspora communities in the U.S. The novel is attractive to many people not only because it exposes the negative side of African immigration and the devastating reality of racism for these diaspora communities but also because it portrayed values that are important to these immigrants and Americans as well. For example, commenting on the novel's racial ramifications, Sajna Najmh argues in her essay *Unmasking Racism* that

Americanah is about race relations in America...it is a novel about living in the margins, of an America observed from the margins, survived by staying in the margins, and escaped or ejected from as the margins become increasingly narrowed. It presents the picture of a failure to create a life—not as an immigrant failure but a failure of the American project and the American dreams. It is a novel about the movements one makes to access privilege.¹⁰⁰

Ifemelu's experience is also a story about triumph over seemingly insurmountable challenges. It is a narrative of courage in the face of animosity. Ifemelu left her poverty-stricken, crime-ridden and corrupt ancestral home in Nigeria in order to achieve the promise offered by the American dreams. In *Americanah*, though, that promise is often broken and that dreams can sometimes become a racist deception.

Focusing on the experiences of the racism characters in the novel face, the chapter argues that African diaspora experience with discrimination as reflected in Adichie's *Americanah*

exposes a new approach to understanding the complexities of this condition. Racism is a major impediment for many of the novel's characters achieving their American dreams and realizing their aspirations; and Adichie accentuates this point through the agonizing experiences of her characters, in particular Ifemelu. Explaining the conditions of these communities further, and the institutional racism which hold them down, Sheila posits that such racist treatments of African diaspora populations is "rooted in the entrenchment of black inferiority, such urban environments continue to play out center-periphery dichotomies established during African diaspora and modernity."¹⁰¹ Sheila's arguments not only underscores the prevalence of institutional racism and their devastating consequences on blacks like Ifemelu, but it foregrounds and complicates the American ideals of justice and equality, in doing so, questions the existence of both.

Scholars often overlooked racism and the toxic nature of race relationship in the U.S when reading this novel. Commenting on the pervasive nature of racism, for example, Onyeka Iwuchukwu argues that theoretically, US-American society is built on practices of equality, fairness, and a high degree of respect for human rights. However, in practice racial discrimination is an equally salient, perhaps more pervasive reality.¹⁰² By stressing the inescapable reality of racism in the U.S., Iwuchukwu reinforces the cataclysmic impacts of this condition on African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu. Furthermore, the novel depiction of racism and its destructive impacts on immigrants according to Sheila "inscribes race as a salient element of transnational discourse in a way that expands how we conceive the interrelationship of history, power and politics."¹⁰³ Ochiel Orem, a literary critic, argues in his essay *What Does an African Woman Want in America* that:

Americanah arrives on the fiftieth year after Martin Luther King's I have a dreams speech; it comes at a time when report cards on race relations in America

are necessary and abundant, when minorities in America, and blacks in particular, are staring down the barrel of Barack Obama's second and final term, interrogating the nature of change, the meaning of progress, and the abstraction of an American dream that is so often a lived deception.¹⁰⁴

By referring to Martin Luther King, a leader in the African American Civil Rights Movements, and one of King's iconic speeches, *I have a Dream* (delivered to civil right supporters on August 23, 1963 in Washington DC), Ochiel, is not only pointing out the powerful racial and political undertones of the novel, but he is also emphasizing the novel as what Petty describes as "a means of resistance and the natural means of expressing the community's grief."¹⁰⁵

By depicting the novel as an instrument for self-realization and resistance, Ochiel not only foregrounds the 1960s Civil Rights Movements in the United States, but also the significance of the novel to blacks cultural experience and struggle for freedom against systemic racial structures, making Sheila to describe the novel as a "vital cultural force"¹⁰⁶ in America's racial, cultural, experience and social discourses. It is important to understand that one of Ifemelu's reasons for immigrating to the U.S for education is because of the incessant teachers' strikes in the Nigerian educational system, which is very detrimental to students' learning and progress. Commenting on this, the novel narrator argues that in Nigerian universities, "strike now were common... Campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Everyone was talking about leaving."¹⁰⁷ I should note that Ifemelu's ability to travel to the U.S. suggests that she is from a wealthy and respectable upper/middle-class Nigerian family. Her determination to move to the U.S. signifies her intention to rise in class standing rather than simply critique, disrupt, or overturn class inequality in her home country.

By moving to America, Adichie opens a new space that challenges past distortions and stereotypes about class and poverty in Africa. In this respect, the author's life and that of her

protagonists often parallel. Adichie immigrates to the U.S. at the age of nineteen to acquire education. She later transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University to live with her sister, who had a medical practice in Coventry. While at the University of Nigeria, Adichie edited *The Compass*, a Magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern Connecticut State University in 2001. Adichie went for further education in 2003 and completed a master's degree in creative writing at John Hopkins University.

Adichie, One of the Few Privileged African Immigrant Scholars in the U.S.:

This critique offers a pragmatic framework for understanding and illustrating Chimamanda Adichie's extraordinarily complex novel, *Americanah*, which can be interpreted as a space upon which Adichie complicates and problematizes issues of race within African diaspora communities in the U.S. in particular the novel's protagonist, Ifemelu, and the U.S. society. Adichie, the writer of *Americanah*, is a Nigerian writer and a very successful scholar. Between 2005 and 2012, Adichie received different fellowships at various American Universities, including Princeton University, MacArthur Fellowship, a "Genius Grant" awarded annually by the John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation and Radcliffe Institute for Advanced study fellowship at Harvard University.

These fellowships provided Adichie with the opportunities to do research and write a series of novels on African immigration experiences in the Western world, Civil wars, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions in Africa, military dictatorship, race relations, cultural experience and a host of other topics, resulting in several books and essays, including *Half a Yellow Sun* (2007), *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) *The Things around Your Neck* (2009) and *Americanah* (2013),

her most recent novel.¹⁰⁸ These awards also made Adichie one of the most privileged writers and/or intellectuals in the United States. Like Adichie who clearly sought and achieved the accoutrements of American class privilege like an elite education and degree, Ifemelu clearly possessed class aspirations that epitomize the American. They are demonstrated by her immigration experience to America, her romantic relationship with a prototypical White American man, and achievement of an elite education that mirrors Adichie's.

Understanding Racism and African Dreams of America

Racism is a devastating and painful condition. It dehumanizes the victims and makes them feel inconsequential and inferior. Many racial groups in America and worldwide, in particular African diaspora communities in the U.S. and blacks in general, Hispanic, Asians and Native Americans, have been dehumanized, oppressed and even killed as a result of racial injustices, oppression and intolerance. These racial groups are marginalized and oppressed simply because of their skin colors. The belief among racist groups in the society is that minority groups like the ones mentioned above are inferior to white people. There is a widespread belief, for instance, that racial groups like blacks, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans are born inferior and not as intelligent as white because of their biological genes. This belief and misconception are widespread and deep-rooted in America and are having devastating and deadly consequences on various racial groups and communities across the country. The American society is not without blame for this, as the country has historically tolerated racism and oppression against minority groups. In his essay called "The Conservation of Races," W.E.B Du Bois describes race as the "...the differences of color, hair, and bone."¹⁰⁹

However, what is true about race is that it shifts and slides and it is an illusion, suggesting that its meaning changes all the time. It is not a fixed concept and it is a social construction. There is nothing permanent to the meaning of race. In their book, *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* Paula Moya and Hazel Markus posit that race is “a complex system of ideas and practices regarding how some visible characteristics of human bodies such as skin color, facial features...relate to people’s character, intellectual capability, and patterns of behavior.”¹¹⁰

Not only does this suggest that discussion about race is prevalent in America but it indicates that the definition of race is fluid. Roderick Ferguson elaborates on this when she argues that the study of race “incorporates a set of wide-ranging analyses of freedom and power.”¹¹¹ Ferguson’s argument once more illustrates that race is a complex idea and that it is a social construction. As Ferguson’s argument indicates, in the U.S. the word race has several connotations and meaning. It has deep historical root, in particular when we consider American racial history of slavery and Jim Crow Era. Michelle Alexander argues that in America, “the idea of race emerged as a means of reconciling chattel slavery.”¹¹² The complex and fluid nature of race also explains why Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin argue in their book *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality at the Movie*, that

What one person regards as a “racial” issue may have been regarded as something else by another. What this means from the outset is that ideas about race are heavily dependent upon social, ideological, and historical concepts. Although historically race has been thought to be a stable category based upon biological evidence, today we approach race as a set of social and cultural understandings about human difference—understandings that are malleable and ever-changing. As with all labels, the terms we use to discuss race tend to reduce the complex nature of human beings and their differences into separate and often simple-minded categories. Sadly, the historical cost of dividing human beings into such broadly labeled racial groups has been enormous.¹¹³

The above quote illustrates that race can be regarded as a deception, meaning that its meaning is not fixed. In her article *The Concept of Race*, Aran Saldanha observes that the concept of race is unstable because “over the last decades there has been some confusion ...about the category of race.”¹¹⁴ She argues further that it is the “conceptual confusion surrounding race”¹¹⁵ that make it problematic to many people.

Moreover, in their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that the concept of race arose from the European encounter with New World and Sub-Saharan “otherness.” Using historical facts and theories, such as critical and African diaspora and modernity theories, they argue that “race is pre-eminently a sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between societies.”¹¹⁶ Elaborating further on the concepts of race and racism, they argue that

In the United States, the black/white color line has historically been rigidly defined and enforced. White is seen as a ‘pure’ category. Any racial intermixture makes the “nonwhite.” We use the term racial formation to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped into racial meanings...there is a continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective...and there is also an opposite temptation: to see it as mere deception, which an ideal social order would eliminate.¹¹⁷

As the quote above demonstrates, race merely reflects social rather than physical characteristics. It also illustrates that the meaning of race is subjective and not objective, reflecting the meaning we as a society assign to it. The above definition clearly shows some of the ways in which racism can serve to dehumanize human beings, in particular people of color, preventing them from achieving their American dreams and purposes in life.

Commenting also on the causes and destructive impacts of racism, John Hodge contends that “racism is the belief that there are superior and inferior “races” of human based on the transmission of organic, genetic, talent-related differences.” Elaborating further on racism, Hodge maintains that “race refers to inherited characteristics; but racism adds the notions of superiority and inferiority. While race may have biological significance, racism is a product of human value judgments.”¹¹⁸

Unmasking Racism and the Complexity of Diaspora Experience

Americanah portrays the struggle immigrants like Adichie as well as Ifemelu face in America. It is significant to note that Adichie, like other writers is an activist, a social commentator, as well an immigrant, and she is illustrating through fiction the world that she actually sees around her. Many of the characters and circumstances represented in *Americanah* are discernible people, places and conditions that some of us have lived in before or are currently experiencing, including rejection, racism and poverty. Ifemelu particularly faces racism in the U.S. and Sheila reinforces this when she argues that Ifemelu is “a victim of racism.”¹¹⁹ “I went to the U.S. when I was eight,” Chimamanda Adichie tells Carl Wilkinson, of the Guardian Newspapers. “My father was a professor in California, so we spent the summer with him. I imagined I was going to a snow-filled place-to me overseas meant snow-and I was initially disappointed how similar San Diego was to my home town.”¹²⁰

This demonstrates Adichie’s upper/middle class status. Adichie was born in Enugu state Nigeria in 1977 and grew up the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in Southeastern Nigeria. She comes from a middle class family and her father was the first professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Adichie’s mother was a school administrator at the same

University. “I love the people. I love the average Nigeria. I love the sense of can-do in the face of all sorts of horrors. I love the languages. I love the way people walk and the way people dress traditionally,” Adichie tells Wilkinson talking about her native country in Nigeria.

My analysis of Adichie’s novel is in no way designed as an exhaustive study of all aspects of the novel. Rather, the chapter examines Adichie’s *Americanah* through a specific focus on its undertones and relevance to ongoing debate over racism and race relations in the US. The analysis is done within the context of a recognized convergence of interest in the interface of fictional narrative, race, gender, class, experience and immigration. The chapter takes a deeper look at the far-reaching and complex fictional representation which can only suggest constructive and dynamic ways of analyzing race relations in *Americanah*. The primary and secondary materials used in this chapter are interdisciplinary in nature and reflect works by disparate scholars from Africa, to the United Kingdom, to the United States of America, dealing with the subjects of African migration, African diaspora, and race. Some of these scholars include Michael Omi, Pauline Uwakhweh, Frantz Fanon, Petty Sheila, Sajna Najmh and Perry Imani.

Construction and Plot of the Novel:

It is important to realize that Ifemelu’s ability to travel to the U.S. underscores her access to wealth, material possession, authority, power and prestige in the Nigerian society. That is, it would have been almost impossible for Ifemelu to travel to the U.S. for purpose of education if she did not possess the above mentioned upper-middle class privileges. Although she is from an upper class family in her native country in Nigeria, Ifemelu is deprived of those advantages when she arrives in the U.S. due to racism. In other words, even though her class privilege gives her a sort of cultural capital that makes her achievements possible, she also faces several impediments,

particularly in the U.S., because she is black. As articulated above, after going through various obstacles, the protagonist becomes successful and she ultimately achieves many of the promises of the American dreams. Adichie knows from firsthand experience, since she lived in the U.S. for many years, the hopelessness and alienation many African diaspora populations face as a result of racism, and she wanted to address these issues in the novel.

Adichie unmask the achievements and hopelessness many African diaspora populations face living in the U.S. Both of these she illustrates through her protagonist, Ifemelu. Ifemelu's life is a story about courage and steadfastness in the face of difficult challenges. In so many ways, though, Ifemelu can be blamed for buying too much into the notion of the American dreams. That is, like many African diaspora communities, Ifemelu completely buys into all the wonderful, elegant and beautiful images she learns about and sees on American television shows, like *The Cosby Show*. As a result, she comes to the U.S. and is extremely disappointed because many of her dreams and expectations turn into deceptions. For this reason, it is logical to argue that Ifemelu is the culprit of her own agonies and disappointments.

Ifemelu's story is told as a fairy tale experience. Raychel Reiff argues in her essay *Fighting the Troll on the Dakota Plains* that Adichie's novel is written as a fable. According to him, Ifemelu is a typical character—a young woman who possesses nothing, but through bravery, insight, and cleverness defeats all the evil trolls that try to thwart her happiness, and finally wins both the “princess” and the “kingdom.”¹²¹ Writing about Ifemelu's experience, Reiff argues that Ifemelu

transforms the fairy tale into reality as she sees and reaps the benefits of America, the many and rich possibilities that Adichie felt America had to offer the individual: he gains wealth; he obtains a practical grasp of things through intense work; he gains himself through encounters with new people, absorbing new thoughts and news ideas; he enjoys political and religious freedom. But Adichie also turns the fairy tale inside out and examines the cost of the hero's success. She sees the loneliness, the

suffering, the heartsickness, and finally the mental collapse of the isolated pioneer, particularly the female.¹²²

As Reiff's argument demonstrates, Ifemelu's experience is an account of a determined young Nigerian immigrant, who-becomes a successful blogger in the U.S. As the narrator argues talking about Ifemelu's achievements in the U.S, "her blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine."¹²³

In America, Ifemelu overcomes racism, and many other challenges and eventually becomes a successful blogger, "who was earning good speaking fees, and had a fellowship at Princeton."¹²⁴ Commenting on the important values of the novel and its positive messages for Americans, Reiff argues that Ifemelu is "seen as a role model for White Americans-a woman who works hard, overcomes obstacles, and becomes a great success. Therefore, the novel appealed to the general public and to educators who used it as a text in high schools and colleges."¹²⁵ Despite overcoming many obstacles to become a successful person in America, Adichie points out that immigration has a dangerous side and she highlights this aspect of immigration through Ifemelu. The novel's protagonist went through several obstacles primarily because of her racial backgrounds.

To illustrate, Ifemelu is denied many opportunities and made hopeless by many White people in her life because she is black. Reiff affirms this argument when he argues that Ifemelu's racial backgrounds served as serious obstacles to her happiness in the U.S. He argues that perhaps the most important reason for Ifemelu's unhappiness is the fact that she is a black woman who has no control over her life because her status in America was much different from other characters. Her status alone (shared with all other women) could account for some of her unhappiness.¹²⁶

In the U.S., it is the white individuals in Ifemelu's life who she felt manipulated, discriminated, and dehumanized by. She is unable to find a job because of her ethnic background.

At the university, her classmates dehumanize Ifemelu by calling her a “nigger.”¹²⁷ Similarly, Ifemelu’s classmates and teachers reject her because nobody “wants her in this country.”¹²⁸ Ifemelu’s frustration and disappointments are so intense as a result of the racism she experiences that the novel narrator says “there was a cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into piercing homesickness.”¹²⁹ Hence, the experiences of Ifemelu with racism in the U.S. remains in what Sheila describes as “a state of irresolvable war, fighting to assert its equality in a societal context that continue to refuse its validity.”¹³⁰

Ifemelu’s achievement as a blogger and many of her happy moments in America, balanced against the challenges she faces because of her racial and ethnic background, her hopelessness and alienation are the two sides of immigration portrayed in *Americanah*. These create two moods and Reiff describes these moods of the novel: Ifemelu’s achievements and hopelessness she encounters in America. According to Reiff, the novel “is concerned with both the joys and the sorrows resulting from immigration, it has two moods. Half of it is an adventure-romance in which Ifemelu finds excitements and fulfillment in America; the other half is a penetrating study in the psychology of the lonely pioneer woman. Both the ecstasy and agony of the conquering a new land are vividly portrayed.”¹³¹ As stated earlier, Ifemelu, like many immigrants, bought into the American dreams and paid the price.

By and large, she is the culprit of her own misery and disappointments she experienced leaving Nigeria for the United States. By creating these two moods in the novel, Adichie not only complicates immigration discourses, but these narrative strategies challenge us to reexamine our attitude toward immigration issues as a whole. To put it differently, through the novel’s narrative

strategies, Adichie opens a new space that questions and challenges our perceptions not only regarding immigration, but race, class and gender by accentuating African diaspora experience as an intricate subject.

Racism through the Eye of Ifemelu, the Novel's Protagonist

In this chapter, I am concerned with the experiences racism of an African immigrant in the United States as depicted in Adichie's novel *Americanah*. In particular, I am interested in the perspective of the novel's protagonist, Ifemelu. She is both (1) an African immigrant student at Princeton University and (2) her determination to excel in the United States in the face of racism. Included are efforts to undermine and marginalize her because of her racial backgrounds and her experiences of defeat and emptiness.

For example, the novel narrator talks about the setbacks Ifemelu, the novel protagonist, experiences coming to Princeton University, a microcosm of the U.S. itself: "Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and "New Haven smelled of neglect. Biltmore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell."¹³² These images epitomize Ifemelu's agonies and disappointments as she tries to adjust to a new culture. The first page of the novel then turns into the narrator providing a graphic description of the entire city of Princeton, its people, their culture and lifestyle, the reality of living in the city as an African immigrant, and the emptiness Ifemelu feels living in the city. The narrator concludes the first pages of the novel by explaining the city's characteristics and Ifemelu's thoughts about the city:

She liked watching the locals who drove with pointed courtesy and parked their latest model cars outside the organic grocery store on Nassau Street or outside the sushi restaurants or outside the ice cream shop that had fifty different flavors including red pepper or outside the post office where effusive staff bounded out to greet them at the entrance. She liked the campus, grave with knowledge, the Gothic building with their vine-laced

walls, and the way everything transformed, in the half-light of night, into a ghostly scene. She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specifically admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty.”¹³³

Hence, the experiences Ifemelu faces become a means of not only bringing to light the hopelessness in many African diaspora communities in the U.S. but it also complicates and challenges America’s ideas of justice, equality and the American dreams.

The novel offers an illuminating codification of immigrants’ experiences with racism and the structural challenges that come with being an immigrant in the country. Furthermore, it focuses on challenging and complicating American imperialism and racism. That is, in the novel, Adichie places too great an emphasis on what John McClure calls “fiction’s indictment of American imperialism and racism.”¹³⁴ Adichie criticizes the notion that America is a city upon a hill, and the idea that America is a country of immigrants. Hence, the novel is designed to complicate and challenge the ideas of the American dreams, the ideas of equality, justice and fairness, and in this fashion understand Adichie’s deeper insights and perspectives.

A major aim of Adichie in the novel is to expose the racist experience her characters’ face, in particular her protagonist Ifemelu. These are characters who face various structural challenges because of the color of their skin. For example, the experiences of characters like Ifemelu and Obinze represent the experiences of many immigrants. These characters all left their native countries in Africa to countries like the U.S. in search of better future for themselves and their families. However, rather than accomplishing their American dreams, they are faced with racism. For characters like Ifemelu, her dreams of travelling to the U.S in search of a better future is shattered because of her racial backgrounds.

Through characters like Ifemelu, Adichie accentuates the agonies many African diaspora communities face in America because of racism. For example, Ifemelu is not treated with the

decency and respect she deserves because she is black. She has felt the impacts of racism firsthand many times in her life, from being denied a job by a white employer, to being called a “nigger” by her white American classmates. Her experiences with racism, for instance, explain why she sets up her blog as a means to discuss this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, despite the blatant nature of racism in the country, many of the contributors to the blog, including a white man described as a “dreadlocked white man”¹³⁵ deny the existence of racism in America.

Another compelling evidence of racism in the novel is when Ifemelu goes to a salon in order to get her eyebrows waxed and she is told that waxing does not work on curly hair (Black people’s hair are usually curly). The racism against Ifemelu escalates and becomes particularly unbearable when she narrates her experiences with the white hairdresser at the salon/spa who, tells her eyebrow could not be waxed because they are curly: “relaxing your hair is like being in prison,” Ifemelu insists. “You are caged in. Your hair rules you. You didn’t go running with Curt today because you don’t want sweat out this straightness. You’re battling to make your hair do what it wasn’t meant to do.”

It is obvious that the spa attendant refuses to wax Ifemelu’s eyebrows primarily because she is black. Additionally, Ifemelu’s comment that “your hair is like being in prison” not only reinforces the fact that she is denied the services because she is black, but it also highlights the pervasive nature of racial discrimination in the U.S. Commenting on her experiences with racism, Najm argues that “Ifemelu is let down and uneasy, stifled by the world she inhabits. Ifemelu, becomes nameless, only a color, a generic type: merely a colored girl, no longer herself but a colored girl-thing.”¹³⁶

Another evidence of racism in the novel is when Ifemelu starts dating her longtime boyfriend, a wealthy White man, Curt. On one occasion, Curt invites Ifemelu to his house in

order to introduce her to his mother. There, Ifemelu notices that her boyfriend's mother disapproves of the relationship because she is black. Curt's mother is not the only person who denounces the relationship, many other white women Ifemelu met at Curt's mother's house also oppose them being together, making Ifemelu to argue that the dirty looks coming from these white women, who are obviously racist towards her, are the looks of people "confronting a great tribal loss."

As Ifemelu argues talking about the racial tensions generated by her relationship with Curt, these white women are not only racist towards her because Curt is white, it was, as she argues, "the kind of white he was, the untamed golden hair and handsome face, the athlete's body, the sunny charm and the smell, around him, of money," that suggest the tension: why would a wealthy white man like Curt, dates a black woman like Ifemelu, when there are several suitable white women he could have dated?

The hatred and racism against Ifemelu by Curt's mother eventually led to Ifemelu and Curt breaking up their relationship. Commenting on her breakup with Curt caused by the racist tension, Ifemelu argues: "And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved." Commenting on Ifemelu's experiences with racism, Najmh maintains that "Ifemelu notices daily, casual racism white Curt does not."¹³⁷ Furthermore, by drawing attention to the tension created by Ifemelu's and Curt's relationship, Adichie questions and complicates race relations in the U.S., further highlighting the inescapable reality of racism in America.

Another key evidence of racism in the novel is when Ifemelu and Curt, Ifemelu's white boyfriend, walked into a restaurant with a white linen-covered table, and the waitress, a white

girl, pretending she did not see Ifemelu, looked only at Curt saying, “table for one?” Ifemelu, observing the situation, visibly irritated and offended, asked Curt why the waitress ignored and discriminated against her. As a means to calm her down, Curt tells Ifemelu the food server did not mean it “like that.” Unconvinced by Curt’s argument, Ifemelu presses further questioning Curt, “how else could the host have meant it?”

Ifemelu faces racism again when she and Curt travel to Canada and the Strawberry-haired owner of the bed-and-breakfast in the state of Montreal completely ignores Ifemelu as the two lovers checked into the restaurant. However, unlike her experiences with the server who tells Curt “table for one,” Ifemelu decides not to protest the discrimination against her because Curt will once again tell her she was too “emotional, impatient and overreacting.” The white linen-covered table at the restaurant Ifemelu and Curt went to functions as a metaphor for the prevalent nature of racism in the American society, a prejudice that is highlighted when the waitress ignores Ifemelu while paying attention only to Curt.

Another proof of racism in the novel can be seen through the perspective of Ifemelu’s boyfriend, Obinze. While Ifemelu immigrates to the U.S. to get education, Obinze travels to the United Kingdom because he was denied American visa. These two lovers’ initial ambition was to travel to the U.S. together but that arrangement was shattered because “he had been denied an American Visa years ago, when he was newly graduated and drunk with American ambitions.”¹³⁸ Obinze’s dreams and aspiration are extremely limited in the U.K. For example, in order to make a living, he “has to get up and hustle” because “everybody is hustling.”¹³⁹

In the U.K., Obinze was denied the necessary documents that he needed to work and achieve his other purposes in life. Left with no other choice, he resorts to borrowing money and some of these important immigration documents “for fear of being apprehended by immigration

authorities. Because he is designated as “illegal” he is consigned to only the lowest paying jobs where the surveillances technologies of the state are permissively applied.”¹⁴⁰ On the whole, Obinze’s experiences with racism and his miseries in the U.K. “brought to him a disorienting strangeness, because his mind had not changed at the same pace as his life, and he felt a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be.” It is important to realize that racism can be overt and covert. Covert racism is when it is not practiced blatantly while overt is when racism is practiced undisguised. In Obinze’s case, his experiences with racism was mostly covert. For example, in the U.K., Obinze was denied a good paying job and ended up a driver, an experience which made him “watched with grave disappointment...he hated himself so much.”¹⁴¹

Obinze’s experience with racism shows that racism can be practiced through political and economic exclusion and Adichie demonstrates this through Obinze, who is living in the U.K. as an illegal immigrant. Commenting on how Obinze’s experience is tantamount to racism Najm argues that “political exclusion is the way in which racism is practiced; economic exclusion is the way in which it is enforced. Living in the U.K. illegally, Obinze’s prospects are severely constrained.”¹⁴² By and large, the novel suggests that racism plays a significant role in Obinze’s experiences and Adichie demonstrates this through Obinze’s hopelessness, agonies and miseries in the U.K. Using every day American style of living such as social media blogging, eating, salon hair styling, Adichie demonstrates that racism is still a major barrier to blacks in the U.S. She points out that despite the pervasive nature of racism, many Americans are oblivious to its devastating consequences. For example, in the novel, Ifemelu is devoted to writing a blog she titled “Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black.”

Through her blog, we understand the experiences of Ifemelu, her various challenges with racism and how she tries to give her complex life meanings and hopes. Meanwhile, while Ifemelu talks about the detrimental impacts of racism in her blog, her blog's contributors, majority of whom are Whites, downplay the roles of racism among marginalized populations in the U.S. For example, while blogging about racism, a white man writes into the blog stating that "race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class now, haves and the have-nots."¹⁴³ To those people, like the white man mentioned above, who deny the existence of racism, Ifemelu challenges them by arguing that

In America, racism exists but racist are all gone. Racists belong to the past. Racists are the thin-lipped mean white people in the movies about the civil rights era. Here's the thing: the manifestation of racism has changed but the language has not. So if you haven't lynched somebody then you can't be called a racist. If you're a bloodsucking monster, then you can't be called a racist. Somebody has to be able to say that racist are not monsters.¹⁴⁴

Speaking further to this racism denier, Ifemelu tells him that "the only race that matters is the human race."¹⁴⁵ This above argument accentuates Ifemelu attempts to encourage this white man who denies the existence of racism in America to reject prejudice, embrace diversity and respect the dignity of mankind. Rather than appreciate Ifemelu's advice, the man, in condescending and prejudiced tone, tells Ifemelu "ever write about abortion? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial. I mean black. Even the black families don't want them."¹⁴⁶ Such argument not only underscore the deep-seated nature of racism in American society but it demonstrates that some people still deny its existence. Hence, the fact that some people in America still deny the existence of racism is reflective of American Whites use of discrimination as a means to control the immigrants' population and evoke what Petty describes as a "profound psychological disruption and societal instability."¹⁴⁷

Another compelling evidence in the text to demonstrate the impacts of racism on Ifemelu is when she responded to the comment by this White racism denier. Exposing the reality of racism in America, Ifemelu tells him that “the only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America.”¹⁴⁸ By making this assertion, Ifemelu demonstrates that racism is no doubt a major problem in America. To highlight, when Ifemelu was living in her native country in Nigeria, she did not experience racism there.¹⁴⁹

Ifemelu might have experienced tribalism, which is a major problem in Nigeria but not racism. To clarify this point, she maintains that it is when she came to America that she realized she was black, something she never thought about when she was in Nigeria. This suggests the fact that Ifemelu has been a victim of racism in America. Additionally, by stating that “I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America,” Ifemelu is acknowledging the devastating impacts of racism that tear apart the fabric of the American society not only for herself but also for many immigrants’ communities.

Describing, for example, the dreadful consequences of racism and its denial by white Americans, Orem Ochiel argues that “*Americanah* works as an intervention, a welcome caesura in a dirge of immigrant abjection often made inaudible or incomprehensible by the continuous popular urging that the world is post-race”. He argues further saying that the novel “provides a measured story—not too violent to be unbearable, or too relentless as to be agonizing, or too horrific as to be unreadable—that serves a gentle reminder that racism is very much alive and growing stronger.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, Ochiel’s argument foregrounds the pervasive nature of racism in the

U.S. and in doing so, questions the legitimacy of America as the land of immigrants, the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Another way Adichie highlights racism in America is by drawing attention to her protagonist's (Ifemelu) experiences as she struggles to assimilate and better her life in the U.S. As the novel demonstrates, Ifemelu's racial backgrounds make it extremely difficult for her to find even a part time job. All around her, Ifemelu sees a great deal of rich and affluent people, beautiful and gorgeous looking houses and cars. However, she does not share in any of these affluences because of the various structural challenges that she faces as a result of her race.

The novel describes the agonies many African diaspora communities in the U.S. with racism and systemic injustices, leading to inequality and injustices in the U. S., the impacts that these predicaments have on them and how they respond to these problems. This suggests that despite their determinations to succeed in the U.S., immigrants like Ifemelu continue to experience racism at the hands of their white American counterparts, highlighting the picture of a defeat and failure to create a meaningful life for themselves, their families, and their inability to achieve the American Dreams. Hence, the experiences of these immigrants' communities suggest that the American system is rigged against immigrants, demonstrating a subtle displeasure with the condition of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in mainstream American society, and through many of her writings Adichie asserts her intransigence and resistance to it.

Commenting for example, on the racial discrimination that African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu face in the U.S., Orem Ochiel, a literary critic and reviewer for an online journal on race titled *Open Letter Monthly and Arts and Literature Review* argues that the situation for African diaspora communities in the U.S. remains dire as they are always threatened by immigration agents to "go home or face arrest".¹⁵¹ These images indicate the devastating

circumstances of immigrants, in particular African diaspora communities in the U.S., to the U.S., echoing Petty's argument that

The black migrant is denied work befitting his education and adequate housing based on his race. In addition, he is denigrated by the society social institutions and faces barriers created by racist stereotypes. Rejected by corrupt, African diaspora and modernity Africa and driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrant suffers psychological alienation that eventually leads him to the revelation that, if he wants equality, he will have to fight for it.¹⁵²

In the light of this, Adichie underscores these racist practices in the U.S through Ifemelu's painful experiences searching for employment in the country.

For example, Ifemelu is unable to secure work because she was discriminated against. The novel's narrator describes a time when Ifemelu was discriminated against and was denied a nurse aid job she applied for because of her racial background. For instance, Ifemelu goes to meet a white woman who needs a nurse aid for her terribly sick father.¹⁵³ This old white man is so sick and in such pain, the novel narrator describes his living room condition: "the living room was dark, unaired, and she imagined the whole building steeped in months, even years, of accumulated urine, and herself working every day in this urine cloud. From inside the apartment, a man was groaning, deep and eerie sounds; they were the groans of a person for whom groaning was the only choice left, and they frightened her."¹⁵⁴ This image underscores the agonizing condition of this sick white man Ifemelu has been contacted to help clean up and care for. Thus, the reference to the ailing individual is reflective of Adichie's use of infirmity and ill health as a means to underscore the injustices, inequality and the institutional racism in the American society, which Sheila Petty argues "evokes a profound psychological disruption and societal instability."¹⁵⁵

Although Ifemelu is open to doing this demanding nurse aid job, she quickly realizes that her racial backgrounds are circumstances she should be ashamed of. She realizes that her circumstances have become impediment to her achieving her American dreams. Meanwhile, Ifemelu tells the woman who has posted an advertisement in the *City paper* regarding her mother's sickness that she is willing to do the job: "I am strong enough to do the job"¹⁵⁶ Ifemelu tells her. Rather than employing Ifemelu, she keeps asking her irrelevant and condescending questions, such as "that's a pretty accent. Where are you from"? Ifemelu replies that she is from Nigeria. Then the woman continues to ask Ifemelu saying "Nigeria. Isn't there a war going on there... Can I see your ID"? The woman asked, and then, glancing at the license, added, "How do you pronounce your name again?"¹⁵⁷

This interrogation of Ifemelu's racial background does not end there. After several minutes of questioning Ifemelu wanting to know her ethnic and racial background, she proceeds to ask if Ifemelu "can live here with my dad. There's a spare bedroom. You would do three nights a week. You'd need to clean him up in the morning." Still talking to Ifemelu in disparaging and condescending tones, the woman described in the novel as "a tired-faced woman" tells her "you are a pretty sight. Look, I've two more people to interview and I'll get back to you."¹⁵⁸

After their conversation regarding the job opportunity, Ifemelu thanks her and hopes to hear back from her. Ifemelu waited for several days hoping that the white woman would call her back in order to offer her the job. Ifemelu was, however, disappointed because she does not receive a call for the job offer. It turns out she gave the job to another person. Despite Ifemelu's diligence and patience, the narrator informs the reader that the novel's protagonist already knew the likely outcome. As she argues, "Ifemelu knew she would not get the job."¹⁵⁹ The fact that

Ifemelu is denied the job, the uneasy and the awkward, unequal interview encounter come to epitomize not only the prejudice that African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu face, but the profound hopelessness and alienation created by racism.

Dumbfounded by her negative experiences in America, Ifemelu continues to question why there is so much racism towards African diaspora communities in the U.S. like herself. For example, during one of her conversations with another African diaspora communities in the U.S. named Ngozi, Ifemelu talks about why she thinks white Americans discriminate against people like herself: “but of course it makes sense because we are Third Worlders and Third Worlders are forward looking, we like things to be new...remember this is our newly middle-class world.”¹⁶⁰ Ifemelu later uses humor to reinforce her point regarding the racist manners they treat her, telling Ngozi: “you could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They will believe all kinds of shit about Africa.”¹⁶¹

As a result of the racism that Ifemelu faces in America, she is extremely saddened, which greatly shapes her negative perception of the country. These experiences created significant doubts and negative impression in her heart as she feels greatly hopeless and disappointed in a country she comes to believing that she could make a better future for herself and her family. The fact that Ifemelu faces discrimination and stereotyping in America not only underscores a growing sense of disappointments and hopelessness many immigrants like Ifemelu face but it shows that the American dreams is also a deception for African diaspora communities in the U.S. like her.

Such harrowing conditions tell us more about the reality of life not only for African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu but for immigrants’ communities as a whole. That

is, Ifemelu's story has the capacity not only to illuminate race relations in the U.S. but to teach us more about US immigration policies, immigrants' experiences and immigrants' communities in the country. Pauline Uwakweh supports this claim when she argues in her book *Engaging the Diaspora: Migration and African Families* that Ifemelu's story provide insights into American race relations, gender, culture and American imperialism and racism.¹⁶² Taken together, Ifemelu's experiences in the U.S both challenge and complicate immigration as a process Sheila Petty calls "cultural destruction and reemergence."¹⁶³

Narrative of Abjection and Struggle:

Associated with the above predicaments is the fact that immigrants like Ifemelu cannot feed their families and live comfortably because they cannot find a decent job. In the novel, Ifemelu is unable to find a job because she is black. No matter how she tries, she is rejected. For example, the novel narrator talks about how Ifemelu "applied to be a waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, and then waited for job offers that never came, and for this she blamed herself. It had to be that she was not doing something right; and yet she did not know what it might be."¹⁶⁴ Speaking further about the poverty-stricken and deplorable circumstances of Ifemelu caused by racial discrimination, the novel narrator argues that "her meager bank account was leaking money. The cheapest sweaters from Ross still startled with their high cost, bus and train tickets added up, and groceries punctured holes in her bank balance."¹⁶⁵

As a result of this, the narrator added that Ifemelu is often "frightened and worried about the possible consequences, a vague but constant worry."¹⁶⁶ Orem Ochiel, a literary critic, shed some insights into the poignant conditions of immigrants like Ifemelu by arguing that "by reading *Americanah* through non-fictional accounts of black life and by in turn reading

conditions of black life through *Americanah* we might be able to place Adichie's novel within a broader and deeper narrative of abjection and struggle."¹⁶⁷

Traveling abroad is not necessarily a passport to prosperity:

As indicated above, one of Adichie's goal is to use the experiences of immigrants like Ifemelu to denounce racism and oppression in the U.S. As the narrator explains talking about Ifemelu's dehumanization: "she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty."¹⁶⁸ Also writing about the frustrating and unfulfilled experiences of African diaspora communities like Ifemelu, and why it is a better idea for Africans not to subject themselves to the racism that come with immigrating to countries like the U.S., Reuben Abati, a literary and a cultural critic, argues that:

traveling abroad is not necessarily a passport to prosperity, for the most part, it could be a ticket to jail, the hangman's noose, an unmarked grave, a bullet in the temple, a life of misery and agony...there are so many young Nigerians who are tired of the scarcity of opportunities in their own country, talented and ambitious young men and women who want to express themselves and grow, they are left with no option but to opt for emigration; because it is so difficult to get a visa, they criss-cross from one country to the other, looking for a land that flows with milk and honey. We must note that this is a country where discipline is taken seriously; a country where truly in the words of Jean Jacques Rousseau, "man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."¹⁶⁹

By showing the hideous sides of immigration, Abati complicates and challenges not only African migration experiences but Western standards and provokes readers to actively interrogate the notion that travelling abroad is the only way African diaspora populations like Ifemelu and Obinze can accomplish their dreams, and make a better future for themselves.

Moreover, Abati's analysis achieves two simultaneous objectives: It contributes to debates on African immigration and provides insights into the systemic racism that have eaten

deep into countries like the U.S. while also questioning how the fragmented state of African immigration experience can lead to a better understanding of African migration as a whole.

Appearance is often not a Reality:

Ifemelu experiences with racism in the U.S. demonstrates that appearance is often not reality. That is, while the U.S. may look attractive on television shows like *The Cosby Show* to immigrants like Ifemelu, this glamor does not necessarily amount to justice and equality for people living there. Unfortunately for immigrants like Ifemelu, her optimism turns to pessimism and her American dreams turn into a deception. Rather than achieving that success, Ifemelu fails. And rather than happiness, she experiences sadness and disappointment because of her racial background. For example, in order to survive in the U.S., Ifemelu asks for financial help from her boyfriend, Obinze, who has been deported to Nigeria by the British government for overstaying his Visa. “How can you be sending me money from Nigeria,” Ifemelu laments. “It should be the other way around.” Expressing her frustration and the fact that no one cares for her and her needs in the U.S., Ifemelu says “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.”¹⁷⁰ What this demonstrates is that in America, where a person comes from and what one’s racial backgrounds are do not matter.

That is, her American dreams immediately turn into a deception as a result of the racial discrimination she experiences. She then realizes that no matter how she tries, her racial background will always serve as her impediment. Ifemelu’s frustration was so deep and her agonies so intense that she felt like there “was a cement in her soul.”¹⁷¹ Adichie’s position, therefore, is that when African diaspora communities in the U.S., they should not expect

different treatment, as they will be treated harshly the same way African Americans have historically been subjected to racial injustice in the U.S. Ifemelu and other African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the novel exist in what Sheila calls “psychological alienation.”¹⁷² African diaspora experience with racism implies an alienation in the American society in which these individuals continue to be subjected to racism, creating hopelessness, estrangement and gloom.

American Dreams can often turn into Deceptions.

Ifemelu’s hopes and American dreams turn into a deception. However, through hard work and determination, she becomes successful in America. It should be noted, however, that one of Adichie’s goal in the novel is to show that the American dreams can often turn into deceptions for many immigrants and she demonstrated this point through her protagonist, Ifemelu. Furthermore, Adichie is an African writer who has a deep understanding of how African diaspora communities in the U.S. communities are racially marginalized and underrepresented in the US society. Her aim in *Americanah* is not only to fictionally portray the dynamics of African diaspora communities and the various structural challenges they face in America but also to highlight American racism using the novel’s characters like Ifemelu, the protagonist. These are characters who are entangled in the field of often oppressive social relations called the United States. Thus, the experiences of Adichie’s characters represent the experiences of many communities and those Gayatri Spivak calls the “subaltern”, the racially oppressed members of the society.

Before travelling to the U.S., Ifemelu is subjected to various levels of oppression resulting from corruption and economic instabilities in her native country in Lagos, Nigeria. The

hopelessness in Lagos, is captured in the novel when one of the characters, Nneoma describes the city as a place where “you have to get up and hustle. Everybody is hustling. Lagos is about hustling.”¹⁷³ In the meantime, Ifemelu is under the impression that her condition would improve once she arrives in the U.S. That is, she believes that in the U.S. she can achieve anything she sets her mind upon unlike in Nigeria where “you have to get up and hustle.”¹⁷⁴

Before she arrives in the U.S., Ifemelu had also seen on television shows like *The Cosby Show*, how beautiful and affluent the U.S. is. Ifemelu’s ideas regarding her future in America turn out hopeless. That show, of course focuses on the experiences of the Huxtable family, an upper middle-class African American family living in Brooklyn, New York. Regarding her ignorance and misconception about the country, Adichie writes that she “saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease.”¹⁷⁵ Writing about her regrets arriving in the U.S., Adichie explains that “she stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matte; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss.”¹⁷⁶

Ifemelu is an immigrant who believes that the American beauty and opulence she sees on television in her native country Nigeria corresponds to what she would experience when she finally arrives in the U.S. Interestingly, Adichie’s evocation of the *Cosby* show and disappointment in America is an even more apt than the author knew at the time of *Americanah*’s writing. The recent exposure of *Cosby* as a sexual predator who used his fame and social position to victimize young women strangely parallel’s Adichie’ story. Indeed, just as the women who sought mentoring from “America’s Dad,” Ifemelu’s thoughts and plans were misplaced.

In his book *Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Imani Perry illustrates the nature of unrealistic and impossible expectations African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu make about the U.S.

The Americanness of the subject of Black America exceptionalism predicates idealized Blackness on claims to, or actualize citizenship in, the American dreams. No wonder, then, that, despite the collective memory of slavery, the legacies of Jim Crow, and persistent racial inequality, generations of willing Black immigrants have followed the unwilling over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Black American exceptionalism sustains American mythologies of perfect democracy and unfettered possibility. It seduces believers in multiracial democracy with the aesthetic of racial equality or color blindness.¹⁷⁷

By bringing to light the hollowness and hopelessness they feel living in the U.S and their inability to achieve their aspirations, Adichie challenges and complicates the ideas of American equality and justice. Hence, the novel suggests that achieving the African dreams of America is preposterous, and the ability to accomplish one's aspirations is dependent on the degree to which African diaspora populations like Ifemelu rely less on the U.S., and more in themselves and their own ability to succeed.

Commenting further on the misplaced faith of African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu, Ochiel argues that "before leaving Nigeria, it does not occur to them that their concepts of the fantastic global North and mundane Africa, diametrically opposed, are so inaccurate as to be almost meaningless and possibly dangerous." He added, "the challenge of their lives is to become American or British, to lose their African-ness, to insert themselves into a world, in the global North, that they imagine will allow them to inhabit a new, prosperous, wonderful, idealized subjectivity."¹⁷⁸

For the purpose of exposing the inconsistencies between the American ideals and the reality of life for immigrants like Ifemelu, many scholars, including-Adichie, produced works

and carried out research aimed at questioning and contesting these American ideals. Scholars like Adichie raise questions and complicate this notion that the United States is a City upon a Hill, an indispensable nation, full of goodness, and freedom for all. These scholars are engaging in various discourses and debates that challenge these notions. They are debunking these myths of American exceptionalism by asking many questions and complicating these narratives. These scholars are compelled to ask questions and debunk these myths of American greatness because they believe that the U.S. has not been living up to these promises, these ideals. For scholars like Adichie, the premise is that the U.S. has not kept those promises. Instead, they argue (using their novel's characters) that people living in the U.S., in particular African diaspora populations like Ifemelu, are dehumanized and treated as second class citizens. These scholars maintain, as portrayed in their works, that many of American citizens faced discriminations of all kinds, in particular racism.

Adichie, her works and Race Discourse in the U.S.

Adichie is a member of the committed younger generation of African writers writing on immigration. Her works take root not only in African immigration, but also in the politics of race, class, gender, culture and experience. Navaratnam, a literary critic, in her assessment of the African immigrant racial experience argues that Adichie's novel is written as a means to address and raise many issues regarding race relations in the U.S: "Weaved into the dominant love story are the narrative of racism."¹⁷⁹ He argues further that if *Americanah* "wrangles with perceptions of race in America, it's because Ifemelu is unused to the concept, which is a very shrewd commentary on the hegemonic functions of American thought. So much of what passes as

discourse on racism is a very specific view of racism that pertains to the American experience, exported globally like Coca-Cola and military weapons”¹⁸⁰

Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at a Nigerian university for close to two years before moving to the United States at the age of 19 to study communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia. “Before I went to live in the U.S. at the age of 19, I wasn’t really concerned with the topic of experience. Leaving Nigeria made me much more aware of being Nigerian and what that meant. It also made me aware of race as a concept, because I didn’t think of myself as a black until I left Nigeria.” She added, “I think you travel to search and come back home to find yourself there. In many ways travel becomes the process of finding. Travel is not the end point, it is the process. I am not sure I would have this strong sense of being Nigerian if I had not left Nigeria,”¹⁸¹ she told Wilkinson when asked about what led her to write about gender, race and experience.

Although a hardworking student in an American university, Ifemelu, experiences racism because of the color of her skin.¹⁸² As a result of her experiences with racism, Ifemelu often feels “a vague but constant worry and frightened.”¹⁸³ As Pauline Uwakweh argues in her essay *The Migrants Burden: Bearing the Thing around Your Neck*, Adichie’s fiction focuses on African diaspora communities in the U.S. and their experiences with racism and family life. According to Uwakweh:

Adichie’s engagement with the migration discourse may have begun with her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), a novel in which she draws attention to female emigration and the plight of professional Nigerian women...strikingly, Adichie’s short story “My Mother, the Crazy African” offers a profound sequel to Ifeoma’s transnational family by its focus on the struggles of an immigrant mother to main a sense of cultural experience in her daughter and husband. It contexts the validity of language, names, and food, as critical parameters of African cultural experience, which also define the immigrants sense of self and pride.¹⁸⁴

Corroborating Uwakweh's argument is Sheila, who argues in her book *Contact Zones*, that "immigration always takes place within broader contexts of nation and that the experiences of migration are affected by the intersection between histories and cultures."¹⁸⁵ As illustrated above, it is apparent that Adichie has dedicated many of her writings to describing and complicating African immigration, race relations in the country, thereby exposing the complexities of African diaspora populations. Arguing further, Uwakweh argues that Adichie's persistence in exposing African diaspora communities in the U.S., the ugly sides of American culture and the toxic nature of race relations in the country "makes her a formidable voice among her peers."¹⁸⁶

Subashini Navaratnam, a literary critic, argues passionately that racism is a major predicament confronting immigrants like Ifemelu in the U.S. To highlight his point, Navaratnam goes as far as comparing Ifemelu's experience with racism to that of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old African American boy who was killed by George Zimmerman, a white man in Florida on February 26, 2012. According to him,

I came to the end of Chimamanda Adichie's recent novel, *Americanah* at the same time the verdict to acquit Trayvon Martin's killer was passed. While immersed in this vast, sprawling book about uncomfortable, unpleasant, and often unmentioned truths about racism in 21st century America, the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer seemed a kind of judgment about America itself, the America that not-white Americans and immigrants have been telling us about for years, decades, centuries."¹⁸⁷

This comparison of the plights of Ifemelu to the killing of an unarmed African American teenager accentuates the profound and devastating consequences of racism in the U.S. *Americanah* addresses the plights of African diaspora populations like Ifemelu in a specific American context in which racism is unbridled. Literary critics like Navaratnam have also insisted that some of the reasons African diaspora communities in the U.S. are marginalized are linked directly to the draconian legacies of racism and African diaspora and modernity:

Through various circumstances shaped by political and social factors, Ifemelu travels to the U.S. for a university education and ends up staying. It's a familiar situation for most post-African diaspora and modernity third worlders—inevitable, practically—this idea that some form of the good life must be found outside the borders of their corrupt and backward birth country: preferably in the West, in the lands of plenty, where years of imperialism and African diaspora and modernity have enabled its subjects to enjoy Freedom, drinkable tap water, and partake of a seemingly unlimited bounty of foodstuff in grocery stores and supermarkets.¹⁸⁸

The major characters in the novel, including Ifemelu, her boyfriend, Obinze, Ifemelu's aunt, aunty Uju, with whom Ifemelu lives when she first arrived in the U.S., aunt Uju's son, Dike, are all immigrants or second generation African diaspora populations in the U.S. All these characters have in one way or the other experienced racism. As Navaratnam argues, all these characters have been subjected to various levels of racism from “unapologetically racist white Americans—or the more forbidding kind, unconsciously racist and well-meaning white Americans.”¹⁸⁹ It is within that disadvantageous position that these characters continue to struggle in American society. By accentuating a power and racial relationship in which these characters are marginalized in America, Navaratnam's analysis depicts African diaspora communities' body as a commodity for white consumption, thus subtly invoking a contemporary parallel with slavery.”¹⁹⁰

Conclusion:

In the final analysis, *Americanah* emerges as a major intervention and is “a welcome caesura in a dirge of immigrant abjection often made inaudible or incomprehensible by the continuous popular urging that the world is post-race.”¹⁹¹ In the novel, not only did Adichie

illuminates the complexities of diaspora experience but she accentuates the disparate manners in which African diaspora populations experience racism and other forms of injustices, the racial and social benchmarks that contribute to African diaspora populations' subjugation in America, the manners in which these racist practices are performed, and the entities that are responsible for these oppressive practices. Through the experiences of her characters, in particular Ifemelu, Adichie highlights the fact that the African dreams of America is fast becoming unlivable and unachievable for many African diaspora populations.

Furthermore, the novel accentuates the fact that racism continues to serve as a major setback for many diaspora communities in the U.S. Adichie paints African diaspora populations encountering racism and various forms of oppressions, and the institutional racism which serve to control and subordinate them. She details the dynamics of race relations in the US, the consequences of racist practices on African diaspora communities, the various levels of injustices at play in American society caused by racism, while underscoring the manners in which white Americans are the most powerful and indulged members of the American society.

Through the manners her characters are represented, Adichie provides readers with an opportunity to understand the complexities and dynamics of racism in the U.S. and the devastating impacts racism continue to have on African diaspora populations. Furthermore, by evoking the damaging and toxic reality of racism, Adichie accentuates not only the agonies many African diaspora communities in the U.S. face, but the pervasive nature of racial injustices erected by the dominant white population as means to control these diaspora populations and repress their dreams.

The next chapter still focuses on Adichie's novel *Americanah* but it explores a different topic/issue. This chapter examines the ways in which Adichie questions and complicates African

immigration to the U.S., with a particular emphasis on the damaging impacts of capitalism “African diaspora experience and modernity,” and the failure of the American dreams for African diaspora populations. As this chapter illustrates, Adichie’s *Americanah* addresses a wide range of issues, including racial and African diaspora and modernity oppression, African diaspora populations experience with alienation and hopelessness, the failure of the American dreams, the apparatus that promote these problems, and these immigrants’ responses to them. This chapter focuses on the impacts of African diaspora and modernity, oppression and the institutions that sustain and reinforce these factors. I should note that in order to avoid repetition in this next chapter, I decided not to do a description of Adichie and the plot of *Americanah* because they are already addressed in the previous chapter.

Chapter Three

Diaspora Experience and the (Broken) Promises of American Dreams in *Americanah*

The American dreams is a phrase that is embedded in American society. It is commonly used in economic, social, political, and cultural settings... Although it

means different things to different people, for the average American it represents a possibility of success, especially an economic success, measured, in general, by an upward mobility. The American dream is about possibilities afforded to one to be able to achieve the necessary resources in order to move upwardly in society.

..... Moore, Ami. *The American Dreams through the Eyes of Black African diaspora communities in the U.S. in Texas.*

As long as all blacks were represented in demeaning or peripheral roles, it was possible to believe that American racism was, as it were, indiscriminate. The social vision of “Cosby,” however, reflecting the miniscule integration of blacks into the upper middle class, reassuringly throws the blame for black poverty back onto the impoverished.

..... Henry Louis Gates. “TV’s Black World Turns—But Stays Unreal.”

Chimamanda Adichie writes that African diaspora and modernity, African diaspora and modernity domination, patriarchy and gender discrimination are not the only obstacles working against African and African diaspora populations and their efforts to achieve the American dreams in the U.S. She argues further that when African diaspora communities in the U.S. move to America, they become victims of negative stereotypes, African diaspora and modernity and the catastrophic impacts of “African diaspora and modernity.” These African diaspora communities are marginalized, objectified and disenfranchised by systemic oppression, institutional racism, and their African dreams of America becomes a deception. Such experiences exacerbate and sustain these immigrants’ failure to achieve the American dreams, forcing them into the lives of alienation, hopelessness and disappointments.¹⁹² This chapter examines the notion of the African dreams of America and uses African dreams as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience. It also accentuates the disappointing realities of the American dreams for these African diaspora populations through the eye of the novel’s protagonist, Ifemelu. The chapter not only explores the American dreams, and its disheartening

consequences for these marginalized characters, but it looks at the disparate interdependent forms of oppressions, alienation and despondency which prevent characters like Ifemelu from achieving the American dreams, cultivating a full sense of selfhood, as they fight “to assert their equality in a societal context that continues to refuse its validity.”¹⁹³

Americanah centers on many characters, in particular Ifemelu, the novel’s protagonist. The story takes place over a period of fifteen year and focuses on these characters’ journey to achieve the American dreams, their life aspirations and goals, the failures and disappointment they face both in their home country, Nigeria and in the U.S. as African diaspora communities, their challenges with African diaspora and modernity, modernity. The novel’s protagonist, Ifemelu was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. In Lagos, Ifemelu attended a university and was also able to attend an American university, Wilson College in Philadelphia on a scholarship.

This approach offers a pragmatic framework for understanding and analyzing Chimamanda Adichie’s extraordinarily complex novel, *Americanah*, which can be interpreted as a space upon which Adichie contests, and problematizes the complexities of diaspora communities, the African diaspora and modernity that the African diaspora communities in the U.S. are subjected to and the idea of the African dreams of America. Given this context, this chapter is a major intervention into the public debate about African dreams of America and race perceptions in America.

Given this background, this chapter accomplishes two purposes. First, it uses African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience/experience. Secondly, the chapter argues that African dreams of America as is mirrored in Adichie’s *Americanah* define a “new” perspective and alternative to understanding African diaspora communities’ experience. Pauline Uwakweh describes this as “an option that is as much self-

affirming as it is nurturing.”¹⁹⁴ In addition to emphasizing the destructive impacts of racism and oppression on the characters portrayed in the novel, I argue that Adichie’s novel highlights the frustrating and agonizing realities of the American dreams for the characters, and Adichie stresses this point through the hopeless and excruciating experiences of these characters as they struggle to survive in America.

Many African diaspora populations experience hopelessness, alienation, rejection, disappointments and incapable of achieving the American dreams when they immigrate to the U.S. They are marginalized and disenfranchised in the country not only because they experience African diaspora and modernity and modernity but also because of the damaging and suppressing impacts of African diaspora and modernity on these African diaspora populations, other racial groups in the country, including white people. These populations, full of optimism, resolves, dreams and purpose when they arrive in America, are met with African diaspora and modernity and disdeceptionment. The predicaments of these African diaspora population in America, for example, explains why Ifemelu, the novel’s protagonist, argues that when African diaspora populations come to America, “you are caged in.” Ifemelu argues further that in America, these immigrants resort to “the kind of poverty that crushed human souls.” These statements once more suggest that these African diaspora communities are besmirched by American social institutions and face obstacles established not only by African diaspora and modernity but also by African diaspora and modernity.

Like many other oppressed racial groups in America, including whites, African diaspora communities’ characters depicted in the novel are marginalized, alienated and exploited in the country, preventing them from achieving the American dreams and realizing their potentials. Commenting on the plights of these immigrants’ community in the U.S., Julutette Bartlett-Pack in

her essay *Recovering the Past*, argues that these immigrants are marginalized by American “apathy and abandonment, which on a larger scale is indicative of many black American families...their journey to wholeness from feelings of alienation is fraught with conflicts, crises, and obstacles...”¹⁹⁵ Ifemelu also argues that African diaspora populations in America “get no sympathy” from white Americans. The uncertainties and plights these populations face in the U.S. epitomize the profound alienation and disdeceptionment of the American life established by African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity.

Historical Context to Adichie’s *Americanah* and Cole’s *Open City*

Unlike Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* written shortly after Ghanaian independence in 1957, Adichie's *Americanah* and Cole's *Open City* are both contemporary novels. They focus on the relationships between the United States and African countries, particularly when it comes to immigration, racial relations and hegemonic structure of power. The two novels also focus on the complexities of diaspora experience; how difficult it is for many African diaspora communities to assimilate to America as well as to “return” home. These novels are also set against the backdrop of the racial tensions and systemic oppressions in the U.S., in particular within whites and minority communities in the U.S.

To illustrate, decades after the slavery, the Jim Crow eras and Civil Rights Movement, racial relations in the U.S. has never been more toxic and discouraging. Rather than being treated humanely and with respect, many people of color, in particular African-Americans, are still being subjected to African diaspora and modernity and modernity. The case of Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old African-American boy shot to death by George Zimmerman, a thirty-three-

year-old white male in Florida on February 26, 2012, illustrates the ongoing racial tensions among people of color and white populations in the United States.

Commenting, for example, on the pervasive nature of institutional racism, discrimination and intolerance in the United States, Tim Wise, a writer and an anti-racist activist in his work *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America* argues that “Americans have a long history of wanting to believe that everything is fine when it comes to race in America, and that it’s time to move on to other things. And when we hear claims that we’ve finally entered a post-racial, color-blind society with the election of Barack Obama, we need to remember this story. Because the fact is, racial inequalities still exist and racial bias still affects the way that we view others.”¹⁹⁶ Wise’s statement is indicative of the toxic and pervasive nature and reality of racism in the United States. It is against these backdrops that Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie write their novels, *Open City* and *Americanah*.

Culprit: Another Perspective

It is important to realize that the African diaspora populations are not without blame for their negative experiences in America: hopelessness, alienation, exploitation, and inability to achieve the American dreams, as they completely bought into the promise of the American dreams. In other words, these immigrants are fooled by the promise of the American dreams. They believe it is real, bought into it and sadly are disappointed by it, suggesting that the American dreams is a deception for these immigrants. To illustrate, African diaspora communities’ frustrations and disappointments achieving the American dreams makes the novel protagonist, Ifemelu to argue that “dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaica or I’m Ghanaian.

American doesn't care." This statement once more indicates that rather than achieving the American dreams, many African diaspora communities in the U.S. continue to face rejection and anguish. The statement "America doesn't care" underscores not only the alienation and hopelessness these immigrants face but it indicates white Americans lackadaisical, unsympathetic and uncaring attitudes toward the plights of these immigrants primarily because they are blacks.

To illustrate, when Ifemelu immigrates to the U.S., she has high hopes and expectations that in America she can realize her dreams, aspirations and the American dreams. For example, the novel narrator talks about when Ifemelu 'first went to Manhattan and she wrote me and said "it's wonderful but it's not heaven...the best thing about America is that it gives you space." Even before immigrating to the U.S., Ifemelu talks about her passion for the U.S. when she repeatedly argues that "America is my dreams country...all I had was my passion for America...I love America...I realized I could buy America...I was looking into buying property in Miami."¹⁹⁷ Sadly, Ifemelu realizes that her American dreams has turned into a deception because of the many troubles and obstacles she encounters. For example, Ifemelu is unable to find a job in the U.S. despite her determination and efforts to get one. Furthermore, she is being threatened with expulsion by her university because she could not pay her school fees. These are all major predicaments Ifemelu did not expect immigrating to the U.S., making the narrator to argue that

She applied to be a waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, and then waited for job offers that never came, and for this she blamed herself. It had to be that she was not doing something right; and yet she did not know what it might be...Her meager bank account was leaking money. The cheapest sweaters from Ross still startled with their high cost, bus and train tickets added up, and groceries punctured holes in her bank balance...Each day, there seemed to be a letter for her on the kitchen table, and inside the envelop was a tuition bill, and words printed in capital letters: YOUR RECORDS WILL BE FROZEN UNLESS PAYMENT IS RECEIVED BY THE DATE AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS NOTICE." It was the boldness of the capital letters more than the words that frightened her. She worried about the possible consequences, a vague but constant

worry. She did not imagine a police arrest for not paying her school fees, but what did happen if you did not pay your school fees in America?¹⁹⁸

As the above quote indicates, Ifemelu's American dreams completely turns into a deception. For instance, in the U.S., she loses her personality and self-dignity. She is cosigned to become a second class citizen in the U.S. Her experiences with racism and oppression explain why she argues that "when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or Ghanaian. America doesn't care." The fact that Ifemelu says "America doesn't care" not only suggests the rejection and obstacles many African diaspora populations face in the U.S. but it symbolizes a growing sense of hopelessness and disappointments in the African diaspora communities in the United States as a whole.

In America, Ifemelu experiences alienation, poverty, hopelessness, racism and all kinds of structural challenges. She is unable to find a job, struggles with paying her rent, university fees and other expenses. And when Ifemelu finally got a job, she worked as a nanny despite having a university education. She also struggles with American culture as "she hungered to understand everything about America." Ifemelu also dates her employer's cousin Curt, a white man. Curt's family and friends are completely opposed to their relationship because Ifemelu is black. Curt's family rejection of their relationship angers Ifemelu and makes her feels further marginalized and racially oppressed by white people.

For these oppressed and marginalized African diaspora populations in the U.S., the "American Dreams" is a delusional discourse to begin with and for other racial groups as well, including white Americans. These disappointments and failures that these African diaspora communities face in America makes Ifemelu to argue these populations face "the oppressive lethargy of choiceness." These problems afflict characters depicted in the book. They are

characters who are marginalized and oppressed and tend to have no say in their own future. They are characters who do not live in free societies. Despite the tumultuous and often agonizing reality of oppression and racism in America, the American society is also attractive to people from other parts of the world, especially those from less-developed places like Africa. This is the novel's greatest irony.

One of the major obstacles to these immigrants achieving the American dreams is the oppressive and exploitative impacts of African diaspora and modernity. That is, not only is capitalism corrupt and dehumanizing but the American dreams is unrealistic in the first place. It is often simply the dreams of capitalism/African diaspora and modernity and that dreams is also a deception. The dreams of wealth is also the simultaneous dreams of alienated labor and poverty. It satisfies nobody in a whole way (including white Americans and even the rich). It is both foisted on those that buy it. It also satisfies some sort of preexisting need for them. They are both fooled by it and buy into it because that delusion satisfies some problematic desire within them. Commenting on the destructive impacts of the capitalism and the unrealistic nature of the American dreams, Michael Parenti in his book *Against Empire* argues that

The essence of capitalism is to turn nature into commodities and commodities into capital. The live green earth is transformed into dead gold bricks, with luxury items for the few and toxic slag heaps for the many. The glittering mansion overlooks a vast sprawl of shanty towns, where in a desperate, demoralized humanity is kept in line with drugs, television, and armed forces.¹⁹⁹

As Parenti argues indicates, rather than bring hope, strength and empowerment to the people, capitalism is destructive to their ways of life. It dehumanizes the people, preventing them from realizing the American dreams, while rendering them completely hopeless and alienated.

Commenting on the disappointing reality of the American dreams and how she bought into it and was fooled by it, Chimamanda Adichie in a 2009 interview "What Are the Dangers of

a Single Story?” argued that she studied a lot about America in her native African country. She read books and watched television shows like *The Cosby Show*, where black families are depicted in positive and promising lights. Believing that blacks families in America are successful and wealthy like the Huxtable upper middle-class African American family in New York are depicted in the show, Adichie immediately immigrates to America hoping to achieve the American dreams like the Huxtable family are depicted doing. It was not until she arrived in America that she realized that the country is a racist, hopeless and alienating place for many immigrants’ communities like herself. Commenting on this, Adichie argues:

So when I came to the U.S., because I had read a lot of American books and I had watched American films and I listened to American music, I didn’t really know America really, but at least I did know that there were different Americas. At least I had two examples, I mean, America could either be Bill Cosby, or it could be “Dallas.” So at least there were two options, right... years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to move to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my tribal music, and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey.²⁰⁰

Like many African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S., Adichie bought into the promise of the American dreams and was disappointed by it. Her story represents some of the ways in which African diaspora communities (as opposed to African Americans) think about the United States even before immigrating to that country. Many African diaspora communities, despite doing well, contented and happy in their native countries, desperately want to immigrate to the U.S. in order to partake of the American dreams. Right from their home countries, these African diaspora populations imagine the U.S. as a “paradise” and a ‘Promised Land,’ a place where their hopes and aspirations can be fulfilled.

These diaspora populations imagine a country devoid of injustices, racial inequality, gender inequality, alienation and oppression. That is, they dream up a country where there is freedom, justice, equality and peace for all. Specifically, they imagine the American dreams, which James Adams, an American historian and writer, in 1931 describes thus:

The American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement...It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.²⁰¹

In addition to the promise of the American dream, these African diaspora communities in the U.S. are lured into the U.S. by the guarantee of the American capitalist system. In other words, they are captivated by the U.S. Free Market economy, which is supposed to represent freedom of the individual.

Adichie, the writer of the novel, despite living comfortably, happy and contented with her situation in her native country Nigeria, is determined and desperate to move to the U.S. because she wants to partake of the promises of the American dream and the U.S. capitalist system. Sadly, in America, Adichie's dreams and aspirations turn into complete deceptions. She realizes that the American dream presented to her on television back in her native country is nothing but a mirage and that her idea of a 'Promised Land' is nothing but a fantasy, indicating further that the U.S. capitalist dream for immigrants like Adichie is a disappointing dream, grounded on hopelessness and misery.

For many African diaspora communities like Adichie, the American dream "represents a possibility of success, especially an economic success, measured, in general, by an upward mobility. The American dream is about possibilities afforded to one to be able to achieve the

necessary resources in order to move upwardly in society.”²⁰² Unfortunately, after arriving in America, a country of her dreams, Adichie realizes that the images she had seen on television back in Nigeria is nothing compared to the reality of life in the U.S. Commenting on the miseries and disappointments many immigrants like Adichie faces in foreign countries like the U.S., Reuben Abati in his book *Trapped: A Compendium of Issues on Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking* argues that

In their new homes they lose personal experience and self-respect, they are relegated to become second-class citizens and become unnecessarily enslaved. They are not able to secure respectable jobs, nor can they create a career that will see them into their future. Rather, they engage in menial, degrading jobs around the clock. Their academic qualifications become of no consequence in the face of segregation and racial bias. They have unfortunately reached the point of no return; the future appears bleak and retracing their steps back home appears an improbable solution. They are already in a big dilemma.²⁰³

That is, Adichie soon realizes that many of the things she had seen on the television in her native country about the U.S is a lie, a misrepresentation and distortion of the reality of life in America. Commenting further on the fact that traveling out of Africa in search of the better opportunities in foreign countries often turn into deceptions, Abati maintains that because many African diaspora communities are seeking solutions to certain complexities they may face, they tend

To seek greener pastures and emigrate, since the ‘other lane’ always appears faster, no matter how often you change lanes. For most youth, to seek the ‘promise land’ is most attractive, they do not realize that the ‘promise land’ is more often than not a mirage. In reality the “promise Land’ appears better only from a distance and that is why it remains a promise land... For the Nigerian youth the agonizing journey to the ‘Promised Land’ starts from the grueling pains of seeking entry visas into foreign countries, particularly Europe and North American countries. Many get frustrated and adopt illegal means that may truncate their lives or lead them to jail; only very few are lucky. However, it is only when they arrive at their ‘Promised Land’ purported to be ‘flowing with milk and honey’ they realize that most of what glitters is not gold.²⁰⁴

The above quotes stress the novel's ideological premise that as long as African diaspora communities in the U.S. continue to immigrate to foreign countries, in particular the U.S., in search of better lives and opportunities, they will continue to be victims of oppression, alienation and racial discrimination. This demonstrates that these African diaspora populations have a delusion, a delusion constituted, in part, in Africa because from of their own desires of acceptance and admiration for capitalism. It is here, the U.S., the global center of capitalism, disappoints.

Unfortunately, Adichie, like many African diaspora populations, realizes that the romantic and glamorous views of America presented to her on television before coming to that country were all deceptions, suggesting that appearance is often not reality. Hence, Adichie's predicaments suggests that these positive images about America presented to her on the television can be counterproductive because they reinforce the myth of the American dreams and an equitable society where anyone can make it, and where racial barriers no longer exists.²⁰⁵

As a result of their predicaments in the U.S., Ifemelu and many of the characters in the novel eventually return to their native countries. To highlight this, Ifemelu is one of the characters in the novel, who despite her success as blogger as depicted later in the book, returns to her homeland in Nigeria after several years of living in a foreign country, a representation obviously grounded in Adichie's belief in the back to Africa movement. Adichie's return to African sentiment as suggested in the novel will be a welcome news for readers and critics influenced by African diaspora and modernity theory, experience movement and back to Africa movement or black Zionism, a movement founded by Marcus Garvey (a Jamaican political leader, a staunch proponent of Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism). Garvey encouraged people of African descent worldwide to return to their African homelands of their ancestors. He

was the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African League (UNI-ACL).²⁰⁶

As a staunch supporter of Pan Africanism, Garvey campaigned intensely and did all he could to promote the return of people of African descent in the diaspora to their ancestral land in Africa. As a African diaspora and modernity writer, Adichie, like Garvey, strongly believes in the return to African ancestral home movement and this is evident in the return of many of the novel's characters, in particular Ifemelu, to her ancestral home in Nigeria after many years of living in America. Again, the fact that Ifemelu returns to her African homeland, despite her success in America, highlights Adichie's African diaspora and modernity ideology, an ideology that is grounded in Afro-centrism and Pan-Africanism, a belief that people of African descent need to embrace their roots and cultures, an appreciation of traditional African civilizations and cultures, and an articulation of African history and values.²⁰⁷

As an African diaspora and modernity African diaspora writer, Adichie strongly rejects African diaspora and modernity, a hugely traumatic experience in Africa. She believes firmly that decolonizing the African mind is the best alternative to the oppression and subjugation of the Africans not only in the U.S. but the diaspora in general. Adichie also believes that decolonizing struggle will prevail, using the return of her characters back to Africa to challenge racial discrimination and stereotypes of African diaspora populations like Ifemelu. For example, in the novel, Ifemelu is treated like a second citizen and stereotyped excessively because of her racial backgrounds, stereotypes so deep that it feels like there is a "cement in her soul."²⁰⁸ The inferior treatments that Ifemelu receives at the hands of her white American neighbors and school mates is a way to justify Ifemelu's inferiority. This is because these white Americans believe that Ifemelu, being a black person, was somehow lesser than they. As a means to justify their

superiority over Ifemelu, they stereotyped her and demeaned her by calling her names and suggesting that she is ugly, dirty, dangerous and lazy.²⁰⁹

Adichie's major goal in the novel is not only to empower her characters like Ifemelu, but to challenge these stereotypes, provides a counter discourse to imperialism, racism and African diaspora and modernity, a counter discourse that accentuates Africans as courageous, decent and beautiful people. As depicted in the novel, for instance, Ifemelu is depicted as stupid, lazy, ugly and untrustworthy because she has "kinky hair"²¹⁰ This notion that Africans like Ifemelu are inferior forms the foundation of African diaspora and modernity discourse, and these stereotypes of Africans are used to justify the social, economic and cultural exploitation of African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu.

Commenting further on Ifemelu's agonies and hopelessness in the U.S.: her inability to find a job, go to school and accomplish her American dreams, the narrator argues that "a sudden crushing loneliness lanced through her and stayed with her for weeks."²¹¹ Rather than achieve her American dreams, Ifemelu becomes a victim of racial discrimination, American failures and oppression. Instead of hopes, she experiences hopelessness and alienation. In the U.S., African diaspora populations like Ifemelu strongly hope and believe that all their aspirations can become true. That is, they strongly believe that by immigrating to the U.S., all their excruciating experiences with political, social and educational instabilities in the native countries would be eliminated. Unfortunately, as the quote above illustrates, upon arriving in America, these characters realize that their expectations and judgement about the U.S. was nothing like what was presented to them on television.

Other Reasons They Migrate to America:

Knowing that the U.S. dream has failed Ifemelu, the novel narrator argues that “I like that you buy into the dream, it’s a lie but you buy into it and that’s all that matters.” Ifemelu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel immigrate to America primarily because of their negative experiences with political, educational and social instabilities in their native African countries. For example, Ifemelu, the protagonist in *Americanah*, argues that in her Nigerian university “campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Everyone was talking about leaving.”²¹² Another reason Ifemelu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel immigrates to the U.S. is because of the bribery and corruption that are deeply ingrained in her native country. Commenting on this, Ifemelu argues that “in my country, Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all that kind of crazy stuff.” Furthermore, the narrator graphically describes the conditions of these immigrants back in their native countries and why they decide to leave for America:

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgia, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like them, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages but merely hungry for choice and certainty.²¹³

The above quote suggests that the conditions of the African diaspora communities in the U.S. portrayed in the novel are critical and desperate, explaining why many of them left for the U.S. Sadly, their efforts to achieve the American dream is crushed by modernity, oppression and the damaging effects of capitalism/African diaspora and modernity

Hopeless Immigrants: Comparing Ifemelu and Mudiwa

Like Ifemelu in *Americanah*, Mudiwa, the protagonist in Unknown Melody's *Through the Eyes of an African Immigrant* is disappointed and heartbroken by her decision to immigrate to America. Speaking about herself and why she chooses to immigrate to the U.S. in the first place, Mudiwa argues that

I was born in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. It is one of the most beautiful countries in Africa...I was blessed enough to have lived in Borrowdale Brooks in a beautiful three storey house which overlooked the valley. Life was good; we had maids, gardener and a driver. I love my city and the life I was accustomed to. I admired the woman of Hollywood, successful, strong, driven, and taking over the world. I desired that life, coming to America was a dreams come true. I anticipated seeing the skyscrapers, the fast life with the cars, the clothes, and the glamour. But television lied. In the Midwest she barely saw the "fast life" My University was surrounded by farms, far from the glamorous lifestyles of the New Yorkers or Californians which I had expected. There was only one main road; the rest was residential farmland. Gosh, it feels like a lifetime ago. I remember how I could not go to sleep because I was excited to be in America even though it was not New York or L.A.²¹⁴

Sadly, Mudiwa, like Ifemelu, realizes that the images presented to her in television in Africa are nothing compared to the reality of life in America, suggesting that appearance can be deceptive.

Commenting further on what she considers her misguided decisions, Mudiwa maintains that in the Midwest United States, where she lives, she "barely saw the fast life because her university was surrounded by farms, far from the glamorous lifestyles of the New Yorkers or Californians which I had expected. There was only one main road; the rest was residential farmland."²¹⁵

Hence, Ifemelu and Mudiwa's experiences in the U.S. signify the complicated and often hopeless and disappointing reality of life in the American society, underscored by the fact that people of African descent often face experiences involving the perpetuation of the white-power apparatus by disadvantaging these African diaspora communities in the U.S.

As is evident in the above quote, a considerable number of African diaspora populations are victims of the misrepresentation of the reality of life in America. Not until after these

immigrants finally arrive in the country do they start to realize that virtually everything that has been presented to them on television about America is deceiving. This explains why Mudiwa maintains that “I anticipated seeing the skyscrapers, the fast life with the cars, the clothes, and the glamour. But the television lied.” Mudiwa’s misinterpretation about the reality of life in the U.S. explains why she regrets her decision to immigrate to there. Commenting on some of her obstacles in achieving her dreams, hopes, and expectations in America, Mudiwa argues:

As time passed I learned how the system worked. Get a job, make money, and pay bills. America is an eye-opener...I faced three major challenges. My first challenge was being on time; it still is a challenge for me today. Since I was a kid, the motto “there is no hurry in Africa,” has stuck with me. That means if you want me there at five p.m., tell me you expect me there around two. My second challenge was having an accent. From their perspective, I might as well have been speaking a different language. It has its benefits because everyone thought I was exotic and the attention was fun for me. I pronounced words one way and everyone seemed to want to correct me. This happened at work all the time. I also learned that all foreigners speak quickly.”²¹⁶

As Mudiwa’s words above suggests, her predicaments and anguish in the U.S. are significantly provoked not only by the oppression and racial discrimination which have become ingrained in the U.S. but also by her own decision to immigrate there. For example, Mudiwa has no legitimate reasons to immigrate to the U.S. considering the fact that she came from wealth and was happy in her native African country. Afterwards, she stated that “I was born in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. It is one of the most beautiful countries in Africa...I was blessed enough to have lived in Borrowdale Brooks in a beautiful three storey house which overlooked the valley. Life was good; we had maids, a gardener and a driver. I love my city and the life I was accustomed to.” Mudiwa came from an upper class African family of wealth, power, and belongs to the highest socioeconomic bracket in the African society. Hence, Mudiwa’s class

status and successes in Africa were enough reasons to not immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams. The American dreams we later learn is often illusive and unsatisfying.

Mudiwa's decision to leave behind all her wealth and fortune in Africa for the precarious, uncertain and devastating conditions in the U.S. demonstrate her overwhelming desire for more wealth and her selfishness. It is important also to realize that her upper class status also helps her to immigrate to the U.S. even though she does not realize it, demonstrating that she is mostly responsible for her own suffering and predicaments in America. That is, Mudiwa is mostly to blame for her own circumstances in the U.S. This is because not only did she buy into the lies and misrepresentations that were presented to her about America on television, but also because she left her comfortable, happy and luxurious lifestyle behind for a life of pain and suffering in America. As a result of her negative experiences, Mudiwa realizes that the American dreams disappointed her rather than made her happy.

Television and Misrepresentation:

Commenting on the role of television in shaping the attitudes and mindsets of these African diaspora communities in the U.S., Jhally and Lewis in their book *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences and the Myth of the American Dreams* argue that television images and the positive representations of blacks and the U.S. in general are partly to blame for the disappointments characters like Ifemelu face in America:

At the heart of this televisual bounty of mixed messages is our ambivalence toward their reality. Many of us know that most television is fiction, yet we see television as a key source of information about the world we live in. It is simultaneously real and unreal... Television provides us with pictures of the world, of our world, and the knowledge that most of these pictures are fictional does not immunize us from believing in them. The belief we form become part of the context within which we understand who we are... TV news, as a form of communication, is thus deeply flawed; but we are more concerned here with how it contrasts with TV fiction.

Though the pictures of the world painted by news programs often seem remote, the visions conjured up by sitcoms, soaps, and drama series intrude far more intimately into our lives.²¹⁷

As the above quote demonstrates, people often derive the meaning of their lives and the world's from televisions. Unfortunately, Ifemelu is a victim of television's misrepresentations and deceptions. Before she arrives in America, she learns a great deal about U.S. cultures and lifestyles from watching *The Cosby Show*, and she completely buys into these fantasies.

However, rather than achieve their American dreams, Ifemelu and many of the characters in the novel face poverty, anguish and disappointment. Once more, this demonstrates that African diaspora communities in the U.S. American dreams is nothing but a deception. Like millions of other African diaspora communities in the U.S. ' communities in America, Ifemelu returns to her ancestral home in Africa because her African dream of Americas turn into deception. Her decision to return to her homelands after many years of disappointing American promises represents Adichie's rejection and denouncement of American values and societies, in particular "African diaspora and modernity," African diaspora and modernity and capitalism. Ifemelu is fooled by situation comedies like *the Bill Cosby Show* into coming to America and not until she arrived did she realize that she had been entrapped.

That is, the African diaspora community is lured by the promise of the American dreams through television shows like *The Bill Cosby Show*. This was a popular show in the early 1980s. As a result of the show, Bill Cosby, the show's principal actor, had become very famous not only in the U.S. but worldwide. In essence, not only did the show made Cosby gained superstardom but he also became very successful in terms wealth. In their book, *Enlightened Racism*, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis argue that it was *The Cosby Show* that allowed Cosby to move from celebrity to superstardom. Whether one measures success in terms of wealth, fame, popularity, or

respect, *The Cosby Show* is now undoubtedly among the most successful entertained in the United States... *The Cosby Show* has become the most successful TV show in recent history, the pinnacle of Cosby's long career.

It topped the annual ratings lists year in the second half of the 1980s, and, although it has been displaced from the number one spot in the 1990s, it retains an enduring place in the world of prime-time television.²¹⁸ Not only does the above statement underscore the popularity of *The Cosby Show* but it demonstrates that it was popular among Americans and audience worldwide. As Jhally and Lewis argues further "what makes the show unusual is its popularity, its critical acclaim, and the fact that all its leading characters are blacks. Cosby has now fallen from grace to grass, as he has been the subject of sexual assault allegations. Cosby was accused by more than fifty women of sexual harassment and assault and was arraigned on these charges in 2015."²¹⁹

The half-hour situation comedy focus on a successful, happy and loving upper middle class African American family, the Huxtables. Cliff Huxtable (played by Bill Cosby) is a gynecologist and obstetrician, and his wife, Clair, is a lawyer. They have four daughters and a son. The Huxtable family represented in the show is successful, they lived together in unity, harmony and understanding. They also lived in attractive New York brownstone home. Looking at the Huxtable family, one can see a successful, attractive professional black family and their beautiful and loving children. The Huxtable family appears like the kind of family everyone family aspires to be. They appeared perfect together.

Once more, television shows like this serve as a means to mislead gullible characters like Ifemelu into believing that the American dreams was achievable when in reality it an unrealistic dream for many people, including white Americans. In *Americanah*, Adichie unmask not only

the failure of African diaspora communities in the U.S. American dreams but the factors that exacerbates these problems. These include situation comedies like the *Cosby Show*. As a African diaspora and modernity intervention, not only is Adichie exposing the damaging reality of America's racism, "African diaspora and modernity" and the unrealistic nature of the American Dreams for African diaspora community but she is also unmasking these problems as a means empower African diaspora communities in the U.S. victims like Ifemelu.

While Huxtables face challenges like every other American family, they appeared happy together. To the audiences who are not familiar with the history and experiences of black Americans with discrimination of many kinds, joblessness, police brutality, systemic oppression and injustices in America, one would believe that all blacks are living like the Huxtables. That is, these audiences would believe that all black Americans are wealthy, happy together as families, have professional occupation, and have decent and honorable careers like the Huxtables. Sadly, the reality for many black Americans is that America is oppressive and racist, preventing these immigrants from achieving the African dreams of America.

Commenting on the Huxtable family, their opulent lifestyle and upper class status, their happy family life and careers, and how all these factors do not necessary translate into the reality of life for many black communities in the U.S., Jhally and Lewis posit that these distinctive achievements and features have made *The Cosby Show* the subject of much speculation. At the heart of much of the discussion lies an apparent contradiction. The United States is a country that is still emerging from a deeply racist history, a society in which many white people have treated (and continue to treat) black people with contempt, suspicion, and a profoundly ignorant sense of superiority. Yet the most popular U.S. TV show, among black and white people alike, is not only about a black family but a family portrayed without any of the demeaning stereotypical images

of black people common in mainstream popular culture. Commentators have been provoked to try to resolve this apparent paradox and, in doing so, to ask themselves about the show's social significance.²²⁰ Like me, many African diaspora community are lured into the U.S. by images and facade such as the Huxtables.

For example, Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie's *Americanah* had watched shows like *The Cosby Show*, where black families are depicted in positive light. Believing that blacks' families in America are successful, happy and wealthy like the Huxtable's upper middle-class African American family in New York, Adichie immigrates to America hoping to achieve the African dream of Americas like the Huxtables. It was not until she arrived in America that she realized that the country is a racist and alienating place for many immigrants' communities like herself. Like me and many African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S., Adichie bought into the promise of the American dreams and was disappointed by it. Her story represents some of the ways in which African diaspora communities think about the U.S. even before immigrating to that country. Many African diaspora communities in the U.S., despite doing well, contented and happy in their native countries, desperately want to immigrate to the U.S. in order to partake of the American dreams. As Adichie's story illustrates, the African dream of Americas is nothing but a mirage.

For example, in America, they are extremely poor, they could not afford decent and conducive apartments. On one occasion, for instance, Ifemelu and her friend Ginika are looking for an apartment in West Philadelphia in an extremely poor and dangerous neighborhood but they are surprised to learn that the only apartment they could afford is in terrible condition. However, despite the dilapidated, possibly hazardous condition of the place, they still went ahead and rented it mainly because they could not afford a better and a more conducive one.

Commenting on their difficulties finding a better place in a safe area of Philadelphia, the novel narrator argues:

they look at apartments together in West Philadelphia, Ifemelu surprised by the rotting cabinets in the kitchen, the mouse that dashed past an empty bedroom... Ifemelu was about to sign a lease—if saving money meant living with mice, then so be it. It was four-bedroom apartment with moldy carpeting, above a pizza store on Powelton Avenue, on the corner where drug addicts sometimes dropped crack pipes, miserable pieces of twisted metal that glinted in the sun... dog hair floated around.²²¹

The above quote not only underscores the squalor and poverty African diaspora communities like Ifemelu and Ginika are living in, but it calls into question the idea of equality and justice in America. It is ironic, therefore, that in a country as rich as the U.S., many people, in particular immigrants like the ones portrayed in the novel, continue to face abject poverty, hopelessness and disappointment.

By drawing attention to the poverty and destitution Ifemelu and Ginika experience, the novel invites readers to question the notion that the U.S. is a country where there is freedom and fairness for all, invalidating the country's image as a place of equal opportunity. In this manner, Adichie's depiction is a critique of America's image and the idea of equality and justice in the country, that even though America is a prosperous country, many of the citizens continue to live in destitution and abject poverty, as exemplified by Ifemelu and Ginika's experiences. Not only is this ironic, but it is pathetic and very unfortunate. Adichie's portrayal of the circumstances of these character, therefore, demonstrates her strong indictment of America's power, image and position as a world's superpower.

Buying into the Myth of the Dreams:

Again, it is also important to realize that Ifemelu is the culprit in her own sufferings and disappointments in the U.S. In other words, she bought into the American dreams just by watching the *Cosby Show*. She has herself to blame for the most part because she is from an upper class Nigerian family, which explains why she is able to immigrate to the U.S. in the first place. It is also this class privilege and advantages that Ifemelu has that affords her the opportunity to attend Princeton University in New Jersey, one of America's private Ivy League Universities. Commenting on Ifemelu's affection for her university, the narrator argues that

She liked the campus, grave with knowledge, the Gothic buildings with their vine-laced walls, and the way everything transformed, in the half-light of night, into a ghostly scene. She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specifically admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty.²²²

The above quote suggests that Ifemelu's upper class privilege contributes significantly to her admittance at Princeton University.

The phrase "affluent ease" signifies that her promising financial backgrounds and access to wealth and power back in her native country give her an easy access to this American university. Unfortunately, Ifemelu is not even aware of her own upper class status and privilege in the society. While she is prosperous and has virtually everything she needs back home in Nigeria, Ifemelu does not realize this. Hence, as a result of her financial success in Nigeria, Ifemelu should not have immigrated to the U.S. in search of a better life because such opportunities are available to her in her native country. Her travel to the U.S., therefore, is an indictment of her own desires and selfish aspirations. More importantly, through Ifemelu's negative experiences in America, Adichie not only creates an alternative vision of African immigration experience, but she establishes what Mazvita Nyanhongo in her essay *Gender and*

Oppression and Possibilities of Empowerment describes as “a public space in which the voices of those women who might have been regarded as subalterns can be heard.”²²³

The Bill Cosby Show, Ifemelu and the Reality of American Dreams:

As illustrated above, one of the primary reasons Ifemelu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel, immigrate to America is not only to escape the oppression, bribery, and corruption in their native country but also to achieve the American dreams. For example, describing her passion and allure for the U.S., Ifemelu says that America is “a fascinating place...I’ve loved America from afar my whole life.”²²⁴ This quote not only demonstrates her interest and fascination with America but it shows that she is determined to achieve the American dreams by all means necessary. Right from their native countries in Africa, many of these characters, in particular, Ifemelu bought into the American dreams presented to them on television programs like *The Cosby Show*. Back home in Nigeria, Ifemelu watches countless re-run sitcom comedy, like *The Cosby Show*, observing American culture and lifestyles. And not only did Ifemelu fall in love with the television program, but she also bought into the deceptions and misrepresentations presented by the show. Believing that what she saw in the show was positive and substantial, Ifemelu immigrates to the U.S. hoping to fulfil those dreams and expectations. Sadly, Ifemelu’s American dreams turns into a complete deception, making her to argue that living in America “is like being in prison. You’re caged in.”

Describing *The Cosby Show*, its ability to influence and shape audiences’ attitudes and mindsets, and in particular the significant impacts it made on characters like Ifemelu, Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis in their book *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show* argue that

When it began in 1984, *The Cosby Show* did not look like a sun fire hit. Its all-black cast offered viewers a gentle comedy without gimmicks, zany situations, or

intriguing plot line. Yet *The Cosby Show* has become the most successful TV show in recent history, the pinnacle of Cosby's long career. It topped the annual ratings lists year after year in the second half of the 1980s, and, although it has been displaced from the number one spot in the 1990s, it retains an enduring place in the world of prime-time television...*The Cosby Show* is a half-hour situation comedy about an upper class black family, the Huxtables. Cliff Huxtable (played by Bill Cosby) is a gynecologist and obstetrician, and his wife, Clair, is a lawyer. They have four daughters and a son; as the series has grown older, they have acquired in-laws and grandchildren. The Huxtables' attractive New York brownstone home is the setting for an endless series of comic domestic dramas.²²⁵

Remarking further on Ifemelu's enthusiasm and passion for *The Cosby Show*, the novel narrator argues that "she saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease." This statement not only shows that Ifemelu thinks very highly of the U.S. but it suggests that she strongly believes that she can achieve her American dreams in the country. The phrase "free of wear and crease" is a metaphor for the American society that is free of oppressions, inequalities and injustices, and it is this kind of society Ifemelu desperately wants to live in.

Unfortunately, upon her arrival in America, Ifemelu realizes that her life in the U.S. is nothing like the images presented to her on *The Cosby Show*. Furthermore, Ifemelu's statement above regarding the *The Cosby Show* suggests that the television sitcom comedy significantly nurtures her interest and makes her completely believe that the American dreams is certain and attainable. Ifemelu's ideas of American dreams are deceptively shaped and influenced by *The Cosby Show*, leading her into a life of misery and hopelessness. Commenting on her frustration and agony with being dehumanized and racially discriminated against in America, Ifemelu argues: "I mean 'nigger' is a word that exists. People use it. It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep out."

As a result of her anguish and disappointing experiences in America, Ifemelu feels disdeceptioned and a “sudden crushing loneliness lanced through her and stayed with her for weeks.”²²⁶ She realizes that virtually everything she had seen on television about the U.S. is misleading and misrepresented. That is, not only did she realize that the American dreams is artificial and illusive but she learns that there is a difference between appearance (American television images) and reality (discrimination, disappointment and hopelessness in America). This disconnect between the images presented on television and real life situation in America make Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis ask many compelling questions in their book *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show*. Among the questions they ask is: “We are used to the idea that television, though it may not be a mirror of society, does reflect basic social changes. How far, then, does television’s portrayal of African Americans reflect real social trends? If the 1980s saw the spectacular success of the black middle class on prime-time television, what was the black experience in real life?”²²⁷

Commenting further on the discrepancies that exist between television images and real life reality in America for immigrant characters like Ifemelu, Sut and Lewis maintain that “once we turn off the TV and switch to social reality, the picture of black American life is rather bleak, especially for the millions trapped in the ghetto underclass.”²²⁸ The above quote demonstrates further that many of the images presented to Ifemelu about the U.S before her arrival in America are superficial, meaning there are many disconnects between the reality of American life and the positive and assuring images of America presented to her on television.

The disparities between appearance and reality are evident in *The Cosby Show*. For example, in the show, a professional black family, the Huxatables, are presented to the American people in positive and assuring lights, making them (Americans) believe that racism was over

and that black people have achieved freedom and equality in the country. As Jhally and Lewis argue, these positive images can actually be counterproductive because they reinforce the myth of the American dream, a just world where anyone can make it and racial barriers no longer exist.²²⁹ These positive and assuring images of blacks on television could make white Americans to believe that racism no longer hinders black Americans from achieving the American dream. Commenting further about this perception, Sut and Lewis argue that “what *The Cosby Show* has confronted, many have argued; is the deep-rooted racism of White Americans who find it difficult to accept racial equality...here, at last, are media representations of successful and attractive black people whom white people can respect, admire, and even identify with.”²³⁰

The positive and encouraging images of these black Americans as presented in *The Cosby Show* also suggests that black people are contented, dismantling blacks’ racial mythology and stereotyping that it has permitted America to view black folk as human beings.²³¹ That is, these images suggest that the Huxtables are representative of a typical African American family, which is completely deceitful and manipulated. The reality, in fact, is that, these images of a professional black family, living comfortably in wealthy Upstate New York, are based on falsehood, as they do not truly reflect the reality of black life in America. As the above arguments further suggest, the majority of blacks in America are unemployed and live below the poverty level.²³² Rather than achieve the American dream, which the Huxtables family portrays in the *Cosby Show*, blacks in America are struggling to make ends meet. Unfortunately, characters like Ifemelu bought into the misrepresentation she saw on television, forcing her into a life of misery, hopelessness and disappointment in America.

African diaspora communities in the U.S., Discrimination and Oppression:

As portrayed in the novel, Ifemelu and many of the characters are always at the receiving ends of American society's injustices and oppressions, especially in their relationships with their white counterparts. As depicted in *Americanah*, racism and oppression hold down and alienate characters like Ginika and Ifemelu, preventing them from achieving their American dreams. As an illustration, for so long, Ifemelu was a victim of racism and oppression in the U.S. Upon her arrival in the U.S., Ifemelu is marginalized and oppressed primarily because she is black. For example, responding to her White American classmate who denies the existence of racism in America, Ifemelu argues that "racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it." Still discussing the devastating impacts of racism on black people like her and why white Americans are not impacted by it, Ifemelu argues that "race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't have that choice."²³³ Not only does the above quote suggest that racial discrimination is deeply ingrained in the U.S., but it demonstrates its damaging effects on black population in America. Hence, the pernicious impacts of racism on African diaspora communities like Ifemelu becomes Adichie's way of not only critiquing racial discrimination in America but it "challenges the passivity of those who allow such violence to unfold without intervening."²³⁴

It is important to realize that Ifemelu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel are not poor because they are lazy and irresponsible people. On the contrary, these characters are hardworking, committed and responsible member of the American society. They are characters who the novel narrator argues have "strength, sincere, cheerful, convincing, thoughtful, well-educated...very respectful and have good home training."²³⁵ For instance, to demonstrate her strengths, commitment and hard work, during a job interview with a white woman, who needs a nurse aid to assist her ailing father, Ifemelu tells the interviewer that "I'm strong enough to do

the job.”²³⁶ As these examples demonstrate, Ifemelu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel are not indolent immigrants. They are, in fact, dedicated, diligent and serious-minded people, who are willing to contribute significantly to the growth and development of the U.S.

What the above analysis demonstrates is that many of the characters portrayed in the novel are marginalized and oppressed in America not because they are stupid, lazy and irresponsible but because of their racial backgrounds. For example, in the novel, racist and oppressive practices are used to condone and maintain racist domination, and this represents Ifemelu’s argument that “I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don’t talk about it.”

The phrase, “race matters, but we don’t talk about it” not only underscores the devastating impacts of racism on characters like Ifemelu but it accentuates the larger context within which these racist practices take place. Commenting on the detrimental impacts of racism and oppression on characters like Ifemelu, Nyanhongo, a literary critic, argues that a considerable number of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S. “tend to have no say in their day-to-day activities and do not make decisions at all.”²³⁷ As Nyanhongo’s argument reveals, Ifemelu is oppressed and marginalized because of her racial background and Adichie emphasizes this perspective through her characters’ painful experience with racism in the U.S.

As illustrated above, Adichie’s novel is shaped by the harrowing experiences of racism and oppression African diaspora communities like Ifemelu face. To clarify, many of the white people Ifemelu encounters in the U.S., whether in her school or when she is looking for a job, discriminate against her because of her background. For instance, her experiences with racism

compel her to argue on her blog that the “simplest solution to the problem of race in America” is “romantic love,” the type she has for Curt, her white American boyfriend. Arguing further, Ifemelu maintains that to overcome the excruciating reality of racism in the U.S., a genuine love is crucial, not the “kind of safe shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable,” but “real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved.” Her insistence on love as opposed to racism suggests that in reality it is a major problem for many African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S.

Because of her negative experience and predicaments in the U.S., Ifemelu often feels like there “is a cement in her soul.”²³⁸ That is, she often gets depressed and feels dehumanized because her white classmates at the university believe she is from a barbaric and savage African jungle, and for that reason Ifemelu must be an uncivilized human being. The novel narrator argues that as a result of her negative experiences, Ifemelu “looked defeated, standing slump-shouldered in the kitchen... a sudden crushing loneliness lanced through her and stayed with her for weeks.”²³⁹ Ifemelu’s experiences, shaped on a foundation of racism and then by the alienation she encounters in America, her reality remains one of frustration and hopelessness.

Through her blog post she titled “Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black,” Ifemelu’s pent-up emotion and frustration against U.S. values, culture, and race become even more evident when she gets into an argument with one of her blog’s contributors, a white man who tries to diminish the impacts of racism on African diaspora communities in the U.S. Talking, for instance, about race relations in America, this white man argues that “race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it’s all about class now, the haves and the have-nots.”²⁴⁰ In

response to this blogger's position on race relations, Ifemelu replies him that "the only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America."

Commenting further on this, Ifemelu argues that "when you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters."²⁴¹ By saying that "I came from a country where race was not an issue," Ifemelu tries to draw a contrast between race relations in the U.S. and in Nigeria, Ifemelu's ancestral home. To clarify, Nigeria is a large country, about twice the size of the U.S. state of Texas and it is located in the central Western Coast of Africa. Uwem Affiah, in his essay *Protest, Resistance and Activism* argues that Nigeria has a population of 151 million people, majority of whom are blacks.²⁴²

When Ifemelu argues that "race was not an issue" in Nigeria, what she is saying essentially is that there are no racial tensions among Nigerian blacks. Although tribalism is a major problem among many Nigerians, race is usually not an issue because the majority of Nigerians are people of the same color: blacks.²⁴³ Unlike Nigeria, however, race relations in America is fraught. In other words, racial discrimination has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation and for African diaspora communities in the U.S. and blacks, in particular, its consequences are overwhelming.

Imani Perry attests to this in her book *More Beautiful and More Terrible*. Perry argues that "in this era in which we proclaim a national ethos of racial egalitarianism, and yet find racial inequality rearing its ugly head in place after place, we see the festering sores of injustice in many sectors: housing, poverty, imprisonment, health, education and on and on."²⁴⁴ As Perry's

argument demonstrates, race relations in the U.S. has not improved. Rather, it has become worse. Hence, by comparing race relations in the U.S. to that of Nigeria, Ifemelu is, in effect, saying that racism is not a problem in her native country in Nigeria, but that racism is deeply ingrained in the U.S., preventing characters like Ifemelu from achieving their American dreams.

Through this comparison, Ifemelu is not only renouncing and rejecting racism in the U.S. but she is also questioning American ideals of justice and equality. Similarly, the emotional and psychological alienation Ifemelu and many of the characters suffer in the novel as a result of racism becomes symptomatic of the continuing battle of the U.S to define itself as a country of opportunities, justice and equality for all. Ifemelu's pent-up emotion and distaste for American lifestyles and race relations, her rebellion against American culture, such as when she further argues that "Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness"²⁴⁵ accentuate the tensions that exist between African diaspora families and the American culture they live in, further underscoring the question of injustice and equality in the U.S.

Realizing the devastating impacts of these discriminatory racial attitudes on Ifemelu, Ginika, one of the novel's characters and Ifemelu's friend, encourages her to ignore her antagonists whenever they try to belittle and make her appear worthless and uncultured: "don't worry about it...be strong...you are going to be okay...you could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They'll believe all kinds of shit about Africa."²⁴⁶ Hence, the racism and ill treatments Ifemelu suffers at the hands of her white American counterparts become emblematic of the challenges facing African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Ifemelu within the generally racist framework of the American society. Writing, for instance, about the destructive impacts of racism and oppression, and the responses by immigrants like Ifemelu, Nyanhongo declares that

A great many African women suffer the triple burden of race, class and gender oppression. These forms of subjugation can relate to one another in different ways. For instance, some women may be oppressed on the grounds of their gender and race; and others as a result of their gender and class. Meanwhile, for some women such as Ifemelu, the novel protagonist, gender, racial and class oppression go hand-in-hand societies.²⁴⁷

As the above quote suggests, these forms of suffering are significantly generated and sustained by oppressive aspects of American racism. Consequently, many African diaspora communities have to learn to carry their burdens with strengths and courage, as Ifemelu and many of the characters in the play do, in order not to succumb to the racism and pressures of American societies.

Rejecting America Due to Racism, Alienation and Hopelessness:

Throughout the novel, Ifemelu and many of the characters in the novel continue to face racism and oppression in the U.S., and these negative experiences make them to reject and denounce many aspects of American lifestyles and cultures. For example, Ifemelu completely rejects the idea of raising her American-born children in the U.S. When Ifemelu is having a conversation with another prominent character in the novel, Jane, about the possibility of raising her children in America, and the difficulties of keeping engaged with her tradition and customs back in her native country, Nigeria, Jane is offended about this conversation because she hates the idea of raising their children in the U.S. Commenting on Ifemelu's displeasure with raising her children the American way, the novel narrator argues "the hardest thing is raising my kids. Look at Elizabeth; I have to be very careful with her. If you are not careful in this country, your children become what you don't know. It's different than back home because you can control

them.”²⁴⁸ Explaining further Ifemelu’s rejection of American culture and her resentment raising her children in it, the novel narrator explains:

I realized that if I ever have children, I don’t want them to have American childhoods. I don’t want them to say ‘Hi’ to adults. I want them to say ‘good morning’ and ‘good afternoon.’ I don’t want them to mumble ‘good’ when someone says ‘how are you?’ to them” or raise five fingers when asked how old they are...I want them to say ‘I’m fine and talks back to adults in the name of self-expression. Is that terrible conservative?’²⁴⁹

By saying that “it’s different than back home because you can control them” Ifemelu is referring to the roles African parents play raising their children in Africa. In her native country, Nigeria, children are taught by their parents not to be rude and disrespectful toward elderly people. That is, African parents are adequately engaged in their children’s upbringing and developments. On the other hand, Ifemelu strongly believes that many American parents are not sufficiently engaged in their children’s upbringing, and this make Ifemelu extremely uncomfortable and heartbroken. Thus, the reference to American children’s bad manners and disrespectful behaviors towards elderly people is a reflection of Adichie’s use of culture and morals as a means to question U.S. experience and ethical standards, and stimulate debates about parenting, culture, language and morality.

It is important to realize that Ifemelu is not the only character in the novel who is outraged and completely pessimistic about raising her children in America. Jane, another character, is also infuriated about this idea. Commenting on Jane’s discontent for the standard of education and lifestyles in America, the novel narrator says: “we pay good money for her to go to private school because the public schools here are useless. Marlon says we’ll move to the suburbs soon so they can go to better schools. Otherwise she will start behaving like these black Americans.”²⁵⁰ These characters pessimistic and unfavorable views about American culture and

the country's educational standards are indicative of an American society where culture and institutions have been perverted by racial discrimination, oppression, corruption and irresponsibility, hence suggesting that the U.S is a morally bankrupt nation.

It is clear that these characters portrayed in the novel are not willing to accept nor assimilate to the American lifestyle. Indeed, these characters hate the American way of life largely due to their negative experiences with racism and discrimination in the country. Hence, for these characters, raising their children in the U.S is a major concern. They are hesitant about assimilating into the complex and massive cultural differences in the U.S., and would grab any opportunity to raise their children such that they do not grow up behaving like Americans. Therefore, for these characters, raising their American-born children in their native country in Nigeria would be a better choice because in their African societies these children can learn the African values as opposed to that of America they consider irresponsible and abominable.

As the above analysis illustrates, many of these African diaspora communities in the U.S. reject American lifestyles and culture, but prefer to raise their children in Africa, their ancestral home. Their primary reason for denouncing U.S. culture is to prevent their American-born children from being influenced and shaped by American tradition and culture. Ultimately, the novel indicates that Ifemelu, Jane and many characters in the novel share related perspectives about what constitutes morals, discipline and raising children in the U.S. By challenging and rejecting American values and standards, Adichie's novel functions as a space of debate, bringing to light the deficiencies and decrepitude of American morals and ethics as a means of initiating dialogue with readers around compelling issues of culture, belonging, experience and assimilation.

Through Ifemelu's perspectives and the viewpoints of other characters in the novel, we see the challenges facing these immigrants' family, particularly cultural tensions and experience formation, raising family, and what constitutes morality and assimilation into mainstream American culture. Describing such challenges that African families like Ifemelu and Jane face raising their families in a complex American culture and tradition, Uwakweh argues that African immigrant families, especially "parents and children bear the brunt of displacement as new space culture reshapes their lives and experience. While the older generation cope through nostalgia by their attempt to create a home away from home."²⁵¹ Hence, through these characters, Adichie complicates the notion of displacement, belonging and experience. Given these points, Adichie's representation of the dynamics and complexities of these immigrants' life family in America underscores her "keen insight on the tension of adapting to new environments, its strain on marriage, and family relationships in general."²⁵²

As Ifemelu's displeasure for American civilization and race relations demonstrate, many immigrants, despite their desire to come to America, live in America, raise their children in America and achieve the American dreams, do not necessarily want to assimilate into American culture. This is because they don't find the American lifestyles compelling or superior enough to assimilate into. These immigrants believe, in fact, that their own ways of live back in their native countries are far superior to the American values they live in. That is, these African diaspora communities do not believe that the American civilization is sophisticated enough to allow their children, themselves and their families to assimilate into. This once again accentuates the tensions between the American dreams, capitalism and the reality of American society. They aspire to achieve the fruits of capitalism. As capitalism the dreams disappoints and the actual society is not aspirational.

Certainly, many Americans would like for immigrants to come into the U.S. and assimilate into mainstream American culture. However, characters like Ifemelu (who represent many African diaspora communities in the U.S. families) reject American civilization and do not want to be part of any of it. This is an effort by Adichie to not only accentuate the deterioration of American standards, morals and values, challenge and indict them, but to call on African diaspora communities families not to buy into the idea that the American culture is superior to their own back home in Africa. Simply put, the rejection of American norms by Ifemelu and many other characters in the novel is Adichie's way of saying that the American idea of morality is not superior to theirs. For this reason, African diaspora communities living in the U.S. must be careful not to be subjected to it.

It is apparent, therefore, that the rejection of American values by Ifemelu, Jane and many other characters in the novel underscore the tensions of parenting, survival and assimilation in the U.S. Adichie makes it clear in her representation of the characters that African diaspora populations families are rejecting the American civilization, despite effort to impose it upon them at all cost. To put it differently, these immigrants are rejecting these American norms altogether and do not seem to appreciate any of them. Another compelling example of this happens during a conversation between another character in the novel Auntie Uju and her daughter named Chikodili. Auntie Uju is very mad that her American-born daughter, Chikodili does not understand how to be respectful to elderly people.

Furthermore, Auntie Uju is shocked and disappointed that her daughter is lazy, rude and would not clean the floor even when food fell out of the fridge messing up the living room carpet. Commenting on Auntie Uju's reaction to her daughter's rude, disrespectful and lazy behaviors, the novel narrator argues that

Aunty Uju worked feverishly, jerking the freezer compartment, slamming the cupboard, and as she pushed back the pot of jollof rice, the pot of egusi soup fell off the cooker. Aunty Uju stared at the yellowish green sauce spreading across the kitchen floor as though she did not know how it had happened. She turned to Chikodili and screamed, why are you looking like a mumu? Come on, clean it up!” Ifemelu was watching from the kitchen entrance. “Aunty, the person you should be shouting at is the General.” Aunty Uju stopped, her eye bulging and enraged. “It is me you are talking to like that? Am I your age mate?”²⁵³

Chikodili’s rude behavior toward Aunty Uju as illustrated in the above quote defies what Uwakweh calls “her culturally grounded and ethical sense.”²⁵⁴ What is significant to point out here is that Aunty Uju, despite having lived in the U.S. for decades, still relies on corporal punishments when punishing her American-born children. In the U.S., this kind of punishment is not allowed in many places and may even be illegal. However, even though she is aware of the consequences of her actions, Aunty Uju still imposes the threat of physical violence on Chikodili for being disrespectful toward her and lazy. To put it differently, Aunt Uju, being an African immigrant, knows that corporal punishment is legal and celebrated in Nigeria, her native country. But she also realizes that in America where she lives with her daughter, such corporal punishment is not permitted. However, regardless of the consequences, she goes ahead and enforces it on her daughter as a means to send a message that she totally rejects American culture and lifestyle.

By enforcing corporal punishment on Chikodili, Aunty Uju is not only putting her daughter on the right path, but she is also challenging and contesting the American ideals and way of life. Thus, Aunty Uju’s defiance and her rejection of the American lifestyle and moral standards present a triumphant theory that suggest that, for African diaspora communities in the U.S.’ experience and values to thrive, the American precepts must be effectively uprooted and profoundly challenged. Hence, in *Americanah*, Adichie suggests that only by challenging and contesting American axioms can the African tenets flourish and be sustained.

Princeton University: A Metaphor for Entrapment and Alienation:

Another key point in her rejection of U.S. African diaspora and modernity and values is that Adichie underscores the notion that certain relationships, and lifestyles in the U.S. have pernicious consequences, infringing on the rights and happiness of immigrants like Ifemelu, the novel's protagonist. Using Ifemelu's predicaments, Adichie not only suggests that race relations in the U.S. is virulent but that it is an inescapable reality of American life. In addition, while it is clear reading the novel that Adichie is trying to reject and indicts U.S. race relations, the novel also suggests that Ifemelu likes some things about the U.S., in particular her university. For instance, the novel narrator describes Ifemelu's appreciation of Princeton University:

She liked watching the locals who drove with pointed courtesy and parked their latest-model cars outside the organic grocery store on Nassau Street or outside the sushi restaurants or outside the ice cream shop that had fifty different flavors including red pepper or outside the post office where effusive staff bounded out to greet them at the entrance. She liked the campus, grave with knowledge, the Gothic buildings with their vine-laced walls, and the way everything transformed, in the half-light of night, into a ghostly scene.²⁵⁵

However, immediately after appreciating the beauty of the campus, a negation of the campus comes through. As Adichie argues describing her protagonist's sudden displeasure with Princeton University, a university that is emblematic of the U.S.,"She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty."²⁵⁶ What this quote validates is how the American society's fragmentation and callousness are mirrored in Princeton University as Ifemelu continues to live under systemic and various structural challenges brought upon her because of the color of her skin. Thus, the graphic description of Princeton campus becomes a lesson on how elegance and exquisiteness do not necessarily translate to equality, contentment

and freedom. Such images as Princeton University, as Petty argues, “can entrap essentially good people in an environment where fear and self-preservation undermine societal boundaries.”²⁵⁷

Commenting on Ifemelu’s sudden displeasure with Princeton University, Orem Ochiel, a literary critic, argues that with her precipitous change of mind Ifemelu “launches into a litany of all that she finds unpleasant, the many ways admittance and belonging are nonetheless denied to anyone of color.”²⁵⁸ By drawing attention to the pernicious and pervasive nature of racial inequalities in the U.S., Adichie invites the readers to question America’s race relations destroying the country’s images as a place where immigrants and citizens can achieve their dreams, empower themselves, and be free from oppressions. In essence, while it is clear that Adichie is appreciative of some aspects of U.S. life, especially the elegance of her university, her primary message is to emphasize that many aspects of the country’s life can also be devastating to the many African diaspora populations. Such problems, which can deprive immigrants’ dreams and aspirations in the U.S., include racial discrimination and gender inequality, which serve as limitation to the ambition and hopes that these marginalized communities wish for.

As shown above, using the experiences of Ifemelu and Princeton University as a metaphor, Adichie illuminates the disparate manners in which African diaspora communities in the U.S. experience racism and other forms of injustices in the U.S. She also highlights the racial and social benchmarks that contribute to African diaspora populations subjugation in the country, the manners in which discriminating practices are performed and the entities that are responsible for these oppressive practices. Adichie paints African diaspora populations encountering racism and various forms of oppressions, and the institutional racism which serve to control and subordinate them. She details the dynamics of race relations in the U.S., the consequences of racist practices on immigrants’ communities, the various levels of injustices at

play in American society, the systemic separation between African diaspora populations and their white American counterparts caused by discrimination, while underscoring the manners in which white Americans are the most powerful and indulged members of the American society.

Courage in the Face of Racism and Oppression:

It is important to realize also that rather than staying a victim of African diaspora and modernity, Ifemelu (whose experience represents the experiences of many African diaspora populations) actually rejects it. The fact that Ifemelu empowers herself in the face of African diaspora and modernity underscores her courage and steadfastness, and these positive attributes explain why she becomes successful. For instance, Ifemelu is able to empower herself, despite her experiences with oppression, working as a blog writer and attending an American Ivy League, Princeton University in New Jersey. Commenting on her successful career in the U.S., the novel narrator argues that “her blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blain.”²⁵⁹

With this new perspective, Ifemelu is more in control of her life and destiny, making a niche for herself in a country where African diaspora populations are marginalized and racially oppressed. By drawing attention to Ifemelu’s negative circumstances and her eventual success at the end of the novel, Adichie invites us to question race relations in the U.S., invalidating the country’s position as a country of immigrants and a place where there is justice and equality for all. Furthermore, by drawing attention to Ifemelu’s accomplishments despite her experiences with injustices, racial discrimination and oppression, Adichie demonstrates that with hard work

and determination one can achieve anything they set their minds on regardless of the circumstances.

As Nyanhongo's argument above further demonstrates, even though characters like Ifemelu are victims of oppression and racism, they do not allow it to define nor subject them. For example, rather than succumbing to racism and discrimination, Ifemelu rejects her oppressions by denouncing American discrimination, which for so long prevented her from achieving her American dreams. These combative and resistant attitudes by African diaspora populations like Ifemelu, her courage and fortitude to fight her oppressors, explains why Sheila maintains that Ifemelu is denigrated by American social institutions "and faces barriers created by racist stereotypes. Rejected by corrupt, African diaspora and modernity Africa and driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrant suffers psychological alienation that eventually leads him to the revelation that, if he wants equality, he will have to fight for it."²⁶⁰ By using the phrase "if he wants equality, he will have to fight for it" Sheila underscores Ifemelu's courage and her determination to "challenge existing Western constructs, thereby creating an environment that places black diasporic sensibilities at the center of the novel's discourse."²⁶¹

While it is true that Ifemelu is a victim of discrimination in America as portrayed in the novel, she does not allow it to define nor hold her down. To put it another way, rather than succumbing to the pressure and suffering caused by a discriminating American society, Ifemelu empowers herself and turns her negative experiences into a positive one. To illustrate, Ifemelu strengthens herself in the face of prejudice, turning her sorrow to joy. Through courage and determination, she attends Princeton University in New Jersey, one of most elite Universities in America. And not only did she graduate, but she works hard and becomes a successful blogger,

dealing with important societal issues, including discrimination and human relations, immigrants' experiences, and gender inequality in America.

In the end, Ifemelu not only comes out triumphant but she rejects her negative and racist images. As the novel narrator argues talking about Ifemelu's triumphs in the face of racism, "I am saved", she said. "Old things have passed away and all things have become new. Praise God."²⁶² Once more, the fact that Ifemelu overcomes several obstacles and her ability to achieve many of her goals in life, such as becoming a successful blogger in the U.S., accentuates Adichie's belief that regardless of the stumbling blocks on one's road to success, a person can achieve their dreams if only they remain strong, courageous and determined.

In acknowledging Ifemelu's achievements in the U.S. despite her experiences with prejudice, the novel narrator argues that Ifemelu "begins surging with hope, a swirl of affluent angels above" because "God has blessed her...with prosperity" "a job promotion and she laughed for good health."²⁶³ Again, this image not only demonstrates Ifemelu's ability to rise above racism, but it signifies her courage and determination to excel regardless of the challenges that she faces. Through Ifemelu's experience with racism, Adichie is suggesting, in effect, that regardless of the obstacles that one faces, it is possible to rise above them through courage, determination and perseverance. Ultimately, such narrative strategies, according to Petty, allows us to see African diaspora populations like Ifemelu as agents "of change within a vibrant black culture capable of transcending the racist barriers raised to impede progress."²⁶⁴

Going Back to Her Ancestral Homeland:

Ultimately, through steadfastness and courage, not only Ifemelu but many of the characters portrayed in the novel reject American values, racism and oppression while embracing

their African roots. That is, unable to stand the racism and racial discrimination against them, characters like Ifemelu go back to their native countries. “But I’m going back home to Nigeria. To live in Nigeria. Lagos is now full of American returnees, so I better go home and join them”²⁶⁵ Ifemelu tells her friend, Aisha, who is curious to know why Ifemelu wants to go back to Africa even though she had a great job in America.²⁶⁶ As Aisha’s argument shows, it makes sense to expect Ifemelu to continue to live in America considering the fact that she has a great life in the U.S. For instance, in America, she attends Princeton University in New Jersey, one of the best Universities in America, and has a great job. However, despite her accomplishments in the U.S., Ifemelu decides to return to her native country in Nigeria. Hence, Ifemelu’s courage and determination to go back to her ancestral home in Nigeria underscores her rejection of American racial discrimination and oppression.

The lesson from Ifemelu returning to her ancestral home in Africa is clear: Adichie wants African diaspora communities in the U.S. to reconsider their attachment to countries like the U.S., and to embrace their African homelands, by doing so can they empower themselves, restore their experience and selfhood. That is, her return to her motherland in an indictment of the failures of the American Dreams, a capitalist dream. The U.S. disappoints. Capitalism is rife with contradictions and obstacles. American society is discriminating and riven with structural inequality. The reality of American society and culture is not aspirational. Instead it demonstrates that it is better for African diaspora populations to return or stay in Africa and create a more just society there than go to a disappointing country as America that is not the African diaspora populations dreams.

Conclusion:

The conclusion of the novel accentuates Adichie's message, a message about immigrant's fiction's indictment of American oppression. The novel is a post-African diaspora and modernity message about Africans embracing their African roots while rejecting American lifestyles and traditions. For example, the fact that Ifemelu, the novel's protagonist, returns back to her homeland in Africa after many years of living in the U.S. accentuates Adichie's rejection of American African diaspora and modernity towards African diaspora populations like Ifemelu and her embrace of her African root. This is not only symbolic of Adichie's desire to reject American ways of life but her efforts to decenter the Eurocentric white gaze, enabling the readers to see diaspora populations, their struggle and experience with discrimination and oppression in a different way.²⁶⁷

The ending of the novel also advocates the need for constructive discourse rooted in African diaspora communities in the U.S.' freedom and liberation. Again, the fact that Ifemelu and many of the characters depicted in the novel rejects American lifestyle, racism and oppression signify the recuperative power of returning to an African root, as Ifemelu and other African diaspora populations characters, all victims of African diaspora and modernity and alienation, find the opportunity to restore themselves by choosing to remain close to their African roots.²⁶⁸

The next chapter focuses on Teju Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief*. In this chapter, I will analyze Cole's two novels, unmasking his beliefs and attitudes about the Nigerian and American societies, with a particular emphasis on the detrimental impacts of capitalism and "modernity" and the failures of both African and American dreams. I analyze Cole's books and the ways in which he depicts his characters as a means to understand their experiences in Nigeria and in America and their responses to their circumstances. As already noted in the introduction,

Cole's writings are representative of global modernity and their dehumanizing consequences not only for African diaspora communities but other racial groups, including white people. These are characters who are excluded from both the Nigerian and American societies and the promise of American dreams. As Cole's novel demonstrates, both the Nigerian and American systems are rigged against all racial groups, in particular Africans immigrants' communities. The characters portrayed in Cole's two novels are those who are dehumanized, disenfranchised, marginalized and alienated from these societies, preventing them from achieving their dreams and upward mobility.

In addition to exploring the impacts of these factors on these characters, this chapter argues that some of these African diaspora communities should be held responsible for their predicaments in the U.S. In other words, a few of these African diaspora populations are the real culprits in the oppression that they face. As the chapter demonstrates, these immigrants, despite being successful in the native countries, immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams. These immigrants are upper class Africans. They are the rich and belong to the wealthiest layer of society in Africa. Despite these immigrants' immense influence in Africa's economic and political institutions, they still choose to immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams. Their decision to immigrate to America when they have immense wealth and live upper class lifestyles in their native countries make them culpable in their predicaments. Therefore, this chapter will examine these issues, unmasking the workings of the system, and these characters responses to their predicaments.

Chapter Four

Diaspora Experience and the Other Culprits: *Open City* and *Every Day Is for The Thief*.

African diaspora communities in the U.S. arriving...not only faced the inevitable struggle of establishing themselves in a new and alien environment but also carried the burden and preconceptions of a system that devalued their cultures and regarded their labor as a commodity to be exploited.²⁶⁹

---- Petty Sheila. *Contact Zones, Memory, Origin, and Discourses in Black Diasporic Cinema*.

Hate demands existence, and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; in a sense, he has to become hate. That is why the Americans have substituted discrimination for lynching.²⁷⁰

-----Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*.

African diaspora and modernity, capitalism, experience, imperialism, migration, systemic racial order, inequality and oppression have for decades constituted some of the principal issues many Nigerians have confronted and which continue to define Nigeria as a country. In other words, these topics have for so long shaped and continue to influence every aspect of the country's experience: arts, history, religion, culture, literature, economy and politics. A majority of the Nigerian population are significantly impacted by these problems, as their behaviors, values and lifestyles have consistently been altered by the negotiation and interactions of these forces. For a long time, the Nigerian people have been victims of both inside and outside forces shaping and affecting the character and image of the country.

Specifically, not only have these Nigerians been impacted by the devastating reality of racism and systemic oppression brought upon the country by white African diaspora and modernity, capitalism, African diaspora and modernity and imperialism but they have been their own worst enemies. The chapter will explore these characters, expose the workings of the system and these characters responses to their situations. I will analyze Cole's books and the ways in

which he depicts his characters as a means to understand their experiences in America and their responses to their circumstances.

Even though African diaspora and modernity oppression, African diaspora and modernity continues to be one of Nigeria's worst experiences, the Nigerian people themselves, in particular their leaders, have been the real culprits in their own devastating realities. For instance, despite the country's abundant human and natural wealth, Nigeria continues to suffer what many economic experts, including Pat Utomi, a Nigerian Professor of economy and management, have called 'resource curse.' I will expand on this later in the chapter. Teju Cole, a novelist, social reformer, civil rights activist and a transnational citizen of Nigeria and the U.S., uses his writings, in particular *Open City* (2012) and *Every day is for the Thief* (2014), as a means to not only call attention to the devastating reality of racism, and capitalist oppression brought upon Nigeria and Nigerians by African diaspora and modernity but he writes unequivocally of the destructive consequences and changes forced upon the Nigerian people and their reaction to these developments taking place in their various societies.

This chapter accomplishes two goals: first, it demonstrates that Cole's two novels: *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief* use African dreams as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience, and that the novels are written to not only call attention to the destructive impacts of "African diaspora and modernity," the devastating reality of racism and modernity, which are deeply ingrained in both Nigeria and the U.S., but also to reform them. As such, these two novels can be described as protest novels because not only do they call attention to societal problems but they also seek to change them. In other words, they are protest novels because not only do they illuminate these problems but they focus on changing the pervasive

injustices taking place both in Nigeria and in the U.S. and a feeling of marginalization that many Nigerians at home and in the U.S. face.

The second objective of the novels is to show that while these Nigerians are victims of corrupt and draconian capitalists and social systems they are also responsible for their predicaments. In other words, while it is a fact that these Nigerians are victimized by societal injustices and oppressions, they are also the real culprits in the obstacles they face. While it is appropriate to blame white oppression and racism for the negative experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S., these African diaspora populations also have themselves to blame for buying into the American dreams and for not standing up for themselves and their countries. To clarify, rather than stay in their home country and contribute to its growth and development, make the necessary changes that their home country deserves, contribute selflessly so their country can be peaceful, secured and prosperous, these Nigerians decide to immigrate to the U.S.

Cole's fictionalized narrative of the predicaments facing the Nigerian people both at home and in the U.S. illuminates the modernity and racial discrimination many Nigerians continue to face in their homeland and in the America. Not only do Cole's novels shed light on the epidemics of systemic racial order and oppression in Nigeria but they force us to reflect on these problems, and hopefully find solution to them. Cole's ability to not only call attention to these problems but his call to change them makes him a social reformer and activist. Not only does Cole write about these issues but he also wants to change these societal problems, while giving voices to the marginalized and oppressed members of these societies. The oppressive, ruthless and condescending attitudes of some of the characters in these novels are indicative of Cole's beliefs that both the Nigerian and the U.S. government officials are corrupt and

repressive. Cole's negotiation of both the experiences of Nigerians in their home country and Nigerian immigrants in the U.S. also makes him a transnational writer.

Through a deep analysis of Cole's *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief*, I explore not only the devastating consequences of oppression and systemic racial order brought upon Nigerians by white African diaspora and modernity, capitalism/African diaspora and modernity but also the ways in which the Nigerians themselves are contributing to their own problems. My intervention, in essence, is that while racism, capitalism and African diaspora and modernity have brought oppression upon the Nigerian people at home and abroad, the Nigerians themselves are the real culprits in their oppression and problems. For example, rather than stay in their country and make it better, these Nigerian decide to move abroad, where they are often oppressed, marginalized and their dreams turned into deceptions.

In fact, current Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, support this point of view when he recently argued during an interview with a United Kingdom newspapers, *The Telegraph*, that Nigerians need to stay back home and contribute to the growth and development of their country rather than seeking better economic opportunities abroad. He argues further that not only are such dreams often turned into deceptions because many of these nations are hostile to Nigerian immigrants but also because such opportunities are often unrealistic and illusive. According to Buhari, "some Nigerians claim is that life is too difficult back home, but they have made it difficult for Europeans and Americans to accept them because of the number of Nigerians in prisons all over the world accused of drug trafficking or human trafficking. I don't think Nigerians have anybody to blame. They can remain at home, where their services are required to build the country."²⁷¹

How are white Americans oppressing Nigerians both in Nigeria and in the U.S.? How are Nigerians reacting to white racism and oppression? What are the roles of Nigerian leaders in the oppression of their people? How are Nigerians the real culprits in their own oppression and predicaments? How has African diaspora and modernity shaped and influenced Nigerian experience? How is post-African diaspora and modernity a positive force in the rejection of African diaspora and modernity? In my examination of these questions, I hope to understand not only the impacts of white oppressions and African diaspora and modernity on Nigerians but also the roles of Nigerians themselves in shaping and influencing not only their own future but also the future of their country.

Breaking Down the Two Novels:

Cole's first novel, *Every day is for the Thief* (2011) centers around an unnamed African immigrant in the U.S., his struggles to assimilate in America and his failures to achieve the American dreams caused for the most part by white systemic oppression and racism. After fifteen years of living in America, he decides for the first time to travel back to his native country in Nigeria. In Nigeria, he is completely taken aback and devastated by the ingrained nature of corruption, inequality, injustices and abuse of power perpetrated by Nigerian government officials in the country. In the novel, Nigerian government officials are not the only ones that are corrupt and oppressive, the novel narrator is also appalled by the pervasive nature of corruption, abuse of power and oppression among American government representatives: American diplomats and immigration agents in the U.S., Consulate and Immigration services officials working in the U.S. embassies in Nigeria. This unnamed novel narrator experiences bribery and corruption, nepotism and favoritism perpetrated in work places by Nigerian and U.S. law

enforcement agents, U.S. immigration agents, Nigerian soldiers and police officers at airports and various other government departments in the country.

Cole's *Open City* (2013) on the other hand focuses on the immigration experiences of many characters, in particular Julius, in the U.S. The novel exposes these characters' experiences with racism and alienation in America, underscoring the fact that being African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S. can be a ticket to racial discrimination and oppression. Using Julius, the novel's protagonist's perspective, the novel examines these African diaspora populations struggles with hopelessness: from Julius moving from his home country in Nigeria to America, to settling down in New York City, through his enrollment in a New York Medical school, where he is training to be a psychiatric doctor, to visiting his friends in various American prisons—where many of his friends have been jailed for breaking U.S. immigration laws.

In these novels, Cole portrays the poverty, failures and hardships that many Nigerians at home and in the U.S. face. Cole believes that the system is rigged against these Nigerians in their home country and in the U.S. In other words, he believes that these oppressed and marginalized Nigerians are victims of modernity, draconian and corrupt government officials, institutional racism and hegemonic structure of power. Using his writings as a tool, Cole not only wants to call attention to these problems facing the Nigerians and by extension Africans home and abroad but he wants to change and reform them. In this regard, Cole is an agent for change in societies where corruption, abuse of power, systemic oppression are deeply ingrained.

The Contradictions of Social System and Post-African diaspora and modernity:

It is important to point out that most of the characters depicted in the novel are products of both the Nigerian and American social systems, the process that permit massive corruption, modernity, institutional racism and oppression. In other words, the inhuman, brutal and

draconian white American characters depicted in the novel are symptoms of larger problems in American societies. They are emblematic of the systemic racial order and deeply embedded injustices and oppression in the U.S. For instance, the white American security officers who imprison, abuse and oppress African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the novel are products of the pervasive injustices, oppression and hegemonic structure of power in America.

Commenting, for instance, on the ubiquitous nature of modernity and oppression in America and how these African diaspora communities in the novel are marginalized and dehumanized, Sheila Petty argues that these black migrants are "placed in a position of anticipating full liberation, only to have it denied by systemic prejudices embedded in a system that refuses him human status."²⁷²

Additionally, it is a fact that most African societies have endured the excruciating pains and humiliation of African diaspora and modernity. Decades after African diaspora and modernity, many Africans continue to suffer its destructive and dehumanizing consequences. Commenting, for instance, on the devastating impacts of African diaspora and modernity on Africa and Africans, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in the book *Unthinking Eurocentrism* argue that

Contemporary Eurocentrism is the discursive residue or precipitate of African diaspora and modernity, the process by which the European powers reached positions of economic, military, political, and cultural hegemony in much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. African diaspora and modernity took the form both of distant control of resources (French Indochina, The Belgian Congo, the Philippines), and of direct European settlement (Algeria, South Africa, Australia, the Americas) ... While nations had previously often annexed adjacent territories, what was new in European African diaspora and modernity was its planetary reach, its affiliation with global institutional power, and its imperative mode, its attempted submission of the world to a single "universal" regime of truth and power. African diaspora and modernity is ethnocentrism armed, institutionalized, and gone global.²⁷³

Decades after African diaspora and modernity, many Africans and non-Africans continue to fight the scourge of African diaspora and modernity oppressions on the continent. One of the tools used in the fights against African diaspora and modernity is post-African diaspora and modernity. The primary goal of post-African diaspora and modernity is not only to understand the workings and legacies of African diaspora and modernity but also to destroy it and all its vestiges on the African continent. Ironically, one of the major contradictions of post-African diaspora and modernity projects is that it turned oppressive concepts like nationalism and capitalism in its inverted corrupt form. To illustrate, while the characters depicted in *Every day is for the Thief* and *Open City* are themselves victims of African diaspora and modernity, that does not prevent them from oppressing their fellow Nigerians.

In their quests for bourgeois economics and capitalism, these Nigerians, in particular their leaders, oppress and marginalize their own people. They become brutal and corrupt, using their newly found capitalist power to marginalize and undermine their people. As such, African diaspora and modernity becomes an instrument not for the improvement of lives and elevation of the Nigerian people but for their marginalization and oppression. Rather than espouse their traditional economic system, these Nigerians, in particular their political and economic elite, embrace foreign economic systems like capitalism, a process that is very antithetical to Nigerian values and tradition. Commenting, for instance, on capitalism and how it helps to contribute to Nigeria's underdevelopment and destruction, John Toluhi in his book *Government* argues that

One factor responsible for underdevelopment particularly in the third world may probably be the incorporation of most third world countries into the world capitalist system. This has come by way of international trade with its export and import components. The world capitalist system is made up of the countries of the metropolises dictating both the pace and terms of trade while the underdeveloped countries are at the periphery—the receiving end of unequal trade relations. The extraction of surplus capital for development in Europe and America (the center) from the third world countries also led to the underdevelopment of the latter. The

appropriation of the economic surplus came via enslavement, forced labor, low wages, acquisition of mineral right and capital export for the purpose of generating huge profits for the imperialists. At the end of the day, third world countries were left poorer and impoverished.²⁷⁴

As the quote above indicates, while post-African diaspora and modernity is an effective tool in the fights against African diaspora and modernity, it has contradictions: It turned oppressive concepts like nationalism and capitalism in its inverted corrupt form.

Modernity, Racism and Oppression in the U.S.:

In *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief*, Cole portrays his frustrations and disappointments with the pervasive nature of racial discrimination, injustices, inequality and oppression both in Nigeria in the United States. That is, the two novels depict Cole's displeasure against the prevalent nature of racial prejudice, global modernity and the second class citizen's position of African diaspora communities in these countries. His animosity and dissatisfaction with oppression and injustice in America becomes more obvious when the novel protagonist, Julius, is brutally beaten and humiliated at the New York Subway station by some white American teenagers simply because Julius is black. As a result of his experiences with racism, Julius argues that he often feels "hopeless, alienated...and like an alien in the environment."

Due to his experience with racial discrimination and oppression in America, Julius argues that he often "feels sorrowful," making the novel narrator to further say that Julius "recent encounter with bedbugs troubled him more than what he had suffered in other ways: racism, homophobia, the incessant bereavement that was one of the hidden costs of life."²⁷⁵ It is this experience with racism and oppression in America that makes Julius to once again express his anger and frustration living in the country: "I needed to get away from America from time to

time, this terrible, hypocritical country, this sanctimonious country. I really can't stand it sometimes. Do you know what I mean?"²⁷⁶ Hence, living in the U.S. for African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius is presented in the novel as being synonymous with being victims of racial discrimination and oppression.

In all of these situations, Julius is confronted with oppression and institutional racism, all of which make him to be marginalized and subjected to second class citizen status in the U.S. In the prison where his friends are incarcerated, for instance, Julius is heartbroken and devastated by their appalling treatments at the hands of immigrations enforcement agents. Talking about the harrowing experiences of his peers, whom he describes are mainly Africans, Latinos, Eastern Europeans, Asians, he argues that

The detention facility itself, a long, gray metal box, a single-story building that had been contracted out to Wackenhut, a private firm, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security. We came to a halt in a vast parking lot behind it. It was then that I saw Nagede's uneven walk. It was, in a sense, the first time I had really seen her: the slanting afternoon light, the vicious landscape of wire fencing and broken concrete, the bus like a resting beast, the way she moved her body in compensation for a malformation.²⁷⁷

The above image once more illustrates the devastating and oppressive condition in which these immigrants are subjected to. Julius' reference to "the vicious landscape of wire fencing and broken concrete" functions as a metaphor for these African diaspora populations alienation, oppression and captivity in a draconian, unjust, unequal and inhuman system.

Despite his experiences with racial discrimination in America, Julius and many of the characters in the novel, refuse to be marginalized and oppressed; these characters' renounce and reject the inferior and second class citizen positions into which the American

society try to subdue them in. Commenting on the frustration and rejection he feels living in America, Julius often talks about how “we walked in silence, seemed vaguely embarrassed...and feels defeated by unforeseen changes.” Rather than weighing them down, the obstacles they experience in the U.S. actually help to empower and strengthen them, bolstering their determination to rise above oppression in America.

Sadly, the American society where these African diaspora communities in the U.S. immigrate to hoping to better their lives and achieve the American dreams disappoints. Like Julius, the lives and experiences of these characters turn into complete deception. Rather than being a promise land, an Eldorado, for these immigrants, the U.S. became a hostile and unsatisfying place. These African diaspora communities in the U.S. undergo racial discrimination as blacks in a country dominated by whites. Despite their determination to succeed and their perseverance against racial discrimination, oppression, injustices and inequalities, this African diaspora population is subjugated, marginalized and forced to bow to their domineering and harsh American immigration and judicial systems, dancing to the tune of institutional racism and modernity. The American whites, who epitomize the oppressive U.S. systems, are not willing to accept the African diaspora community as full citizens. Rather, they see them as lawbreakers, criminals and outsiders. The needs, aspiration and dreams of these immigrants’ community are violated and completely subverted. Shedding insight into their predicaments, Julius argues saying

and, as thought leads to thought, standing there looking at the river, I felt an unexpected pang of my own, a sudden urgency and sorrow, but the image of the one I was thinking of flitted past quickly...it was getting cold, but stood awhile longer. How easy it would be, I thought, to slip gently into the water here, and go down to the depths. I knelt, and trailed my hand in the Hudson. It was frigid.²⁷⁸

The phrases “a sudden urgency and sorrow,” “cold,” and “frigid” as used in the above quote function as metaphors for the frustrations and miseries the African immigrant community face in an oppressive and racist American society.

In the novel, Cole also seems to be convinced that while being black in the U.S. is synonymous with hopelessness and alienation, whiteness is tied to power, authority, purity, bravery and valor. As an illustration, the white security officer who makes disparaging remarks towards incarcerated African diaspora community and who makes sure they are locked up for ever in jail is the symbol of white power and oppression. As the controller of the prison, he makes decisions and enforces tough and dehumanizing immigration policies, which these oppressed and marginalized African diaspora community prisoners must obey. And as prisoners, these immigrants are subordinated and made completely silent. They are at the mercy of this vicious and unsympathetic white immigration officer, signifying once more that racism is deep-rooted in the U.S. Hence, Cole seems to suggest that no form of justice and emancipations will be achieved by African diaspora community under such draconian system.

Cole also seems to imply that the pervasive nature of racism and discrimination in the U.S. would make it extremely difficult for African community to achieve their American dreams and reach their potentials in the country. In other words, Cole’s portrayal of his characters implies that no form of justice, equality and self-empowerment will be realized by African diaspora community in the U.S. under such prejudiced and racist conditions. With this in mind, Cole is decisive and determined not only in his efforts to expose the inescapable reality of racial discrimination and oppression in the U.S. but also

as a means to empower and free this subjugated immigrants' community and for the purpose of their emancipation and self-empowerment and equality.

Julius's experience in the U.S, like the experiences of many characters in the novel, indicates that they are victims of racial discrimination and oppression in the U.S. Most important, Cole depicts the characters in the novel as agents of change and progress within the U.S. capable "of transcending the racist barriers raised to impede progress."²⁷⁹ Rather than remain victims of racial discrimination and modernity, these characters attain self-empowerment and freedom. Julius, the novel protagonist, despite the obstacles that he faces living in the U.S. as an African diaspora community, later becomes a psychiatric doctor, having overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Commenting on the reality of racism and oppression for these marginalized and denigrated African diaspora communities in the U.S., Sheila argues that they are denigrated by the U.S. social institutions "and faces barriers created by racist stereotypes. Rejected by corrupt, African diaspora and modernity Africa and driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrant suffers psychological alienation that eventually leads him to the revelation that, if he wants equality, he will have to fight for it."²⁸⁰ Looking at the experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius, it is possible to argue that *Open City* portrays the U.S. society as a space in which African diaspora community are dehumanized and treated as a second class citizen primarily because they are black.

Through these characters' story and experience, it is logical to conclude that the American society has become a space in which immigrants' experience "becomes fragmented and alienated in a contradictory environment where equality is promised but

never delivered.”²⁸¹ Julius’ statement that New York is a “beautiful...happy city” signifies that he expects not only to be able to achieve his American dreams but to find a promise land based on justice, equality and economic opportunities for all. Sadly, the fact that these characters portrayed in the novel are denied their American dreams, marginalized and treated as second class citizens, indicates the pervasive nature of racial intolerance, oppression and inequality in the U.S.

The various U.S. authorities (controlled and dominated by mostly white Americans) uses immigration policy not only as a means to control the immigrants’ population in the U.S. but also to perpetuate institutional racism and oppression against the African diaspora communities in the U.S. In the novel, Cole describes one of such oppressive immigration encounters using the story of a white immigration official, who was extremely racist and condescending towards the African diaspora community who are serving times for violating the U.S. immigration laws. Talking about the draconian and oppressive nature of the prison and the abrasive posture of this immigration officer, Julius posits that

The newcomers group join the line, which appeared to consist of recent immigrants: Africans, Latinos, Eastern Europeans, and Asians. These were the people, in other words, who would have cause to visit someone at a detention facility. The wind was cool, and it soon became cold...we showed our ID cards, passed through the metal detectors, and were let into the waiting room...the security officers—oversize, bored, brusque-mannered people, people who made no pretense of enjoying their work—took the visitors. Those waiting their turn were mostly silent, staring into space. That purgatorial waiting room had no windows, and was brightly lit with florescent tubes, which seemed to suck into them the little remaining air.²⁸²

Not only are these marginalized and oppressed immigrants put in jail for breaking the U.S. immigration law but they are also subjected to unfathomable and atrocious conditions.

Julius description that “those waiting their turn were mostly silent, staring into space. That

purgatorial waiting room had no windows” illustrates my point that the condition of the prison was horrifying.

Julius’ statement that the security officers guarding the prison is “brusque-mannered” further illustrate the draconian and oppressive manners that these incarcerated immigrants were treated. These African diaspora community were marginalized, subordinated and treated like second class citizen by virtue of the race, suggesting once more that not only is the novel trying to illuminate the pervasive nature of racism and oppression in the U.S. but it attempts to show that no such of equality, self-empowerment and freedom will be attained under such inhuman and unjust system.

These excruciating conditions that African diaspora community are subjected to in the U.S. suggests further that the group of immigrants are in the words of Petty Sheila a “commodity to be exploited.”²⁸³ Commenting further on the experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius, Sheila argues that they “also carried the burden and preconceptions of a system that devalued their culture...the black subjects formed by the failure of emancipation to deliver true equality, the black migrant is placed in a position of anticipating full liberation, only to have it denied by systemic prejudices embedded in a system that refuses him human status.”²⁸⁴

As Sheila’s quote demonstrates, African diaspora communities in the U.S. portrayed in the novel are dehumanized, alienated and marginalized primarily because they are blacks. As a result, they are owned as if they were ‘property’ by white Americans. These immigrants are also treated like animals and their humanity is undermined through injustices, racism and draconian immigration policies. The security officer mentioned in the above quote epitomizes this draconian and subjugating U.S. power and control. In that

prison, he ruled and dominated these incarcerated immigrants “as if he were a god.” His influence and domination of these immigrants is unbridled while his instruction remains unquestionable and unchallenged. This security officer makes oppressive decisions that significantly affect the lives of these immigrants in negative ways, while no one can question his authority no matter how pernicious they are.

Continuum of Oppression and Racism:

Julius’ friends are not the only ones who are trapped and are subordinated, oppressed and marginalized in the American society, Julius himself is a victim of African diaspora and modernity in the country. In the U.S., Julius experiences are a continuum of discrimination and subjugation from arriving in his home country in Nigeria to living in New York. In *Open City*, white Americans are the oppressors, they are the lords and masters with African diaspora community like Julius being the inferiors and subjects. One of Julius’ experiences with racial discrimination in New York City happens when he meets some white teenagers in the city’s subway. During this encounter, these teenagers disparage Julius by calling him condescending names even when Julius has not done anything to them to deserve this. Commenting on this, Julius argues

At the almost empty subway station, there was a family of out-of-towners waiting for the train. A girl of thirteen sat on the bench next to me. Her ten-year-old brother came to join her. They were out of ear shots of their parents who... were absorbed in their own conversation. Hey mister, she said, turning to me, wassup? She made signs with her fingers and, with her brother, started laughing...they had been mimicking slanted eyes, and exaggerated bows before they came to where I was. They now both turned to me. Are you a gangster, mister? They both flashed gang signs, or their ideas of gang signs...he is black, said the girl...I bet he’s a gangster, her brother said. They continued flicking their fingers at me for several minutes. Twenty yards away, their parents talked with each other, oblivious.²⁸⁵

The above quote not only illustrates the hideous realities of racism and oppression on the African diaspora community like the novel protagonist, Julius, but it suggests that prejudice is deeply ingrained in the American society. Hence, the novel is about the hopelessness and estrangement African diaspora communities in the U.S. communities face in the U.S., race relations, and the impacts of racism and oppression on this marginalized immigrants' community in the country.

The novel raises fundamental questions about the harsh realities of racism on an individual and community levels, provoking fundamental dialogues on race relations, alienation and oppression in America. Commenting, for example, on the pervasive nature of racism and oppression in America and their heartbreaking impacts on this group of immigrants, Sanja Najmh in his essay *Unmasking Racism* argues that *Open City*

Is about race relations in America...the systemic division between the global North and global South? It is a novel about living in the margin, survived by staying in the margins, and escaped or rejected from as the margins become increasingly narrow. It represents the picture of a failure to create a life—not as an immigrant failure but as a failure of the American project and the American dreams. It is a novel about the movements one makes to access the privilege.²⁸⁶

The above quote not only indicates the painful and excruciating consequences of racism and oppression on African diaspora community portrayed in the novel but it challenges the insensitivity and indifference of those who allow such attitudes to spread in the U.S. without interceding. Furthermore, the above quote signifies very complicated relationships among the various strata of color in the American society, accentuated by the fact that individuals of immigrants' origin often are relegated to positions involving the perpetuation of the white-power apparatus by disadvantaging African diaspora population.²⁸⁷

The white teenagers mentioned in the above quote who Julius meets at the New York subway station are apparently discriminatory toward him by asking if he is a gangster simply because he is black. Such denigrating expressions highlight the stereotypical and racist depiction

of blacks in mainstream America and, once more, suggest that racial discrimination and oppression is deeply ingrained in the country. Moreover, when these teenagers belittle Julius and call him stereotypical and degrading names despite Julius not provoking nor disrespecting them, he is dumbfounded and feels horrible about himself, not understanding why these teenagers dehumanize him and treat him like a second class citizen, prompting him to say “I was vaguely embarrassed... stunned into momentary confusion, as if I had just been told something that wasn’t possible.”²⁸⁸ Expressing his unhappiness and frustration with this horrendous experience further, Julius says he feels “defeated and saddened.”²⁸⁹

His demeaning experiences at the hands of these teenagers also leads him to say about himself, “I became aware of just how fleeting the sense of happiness was.” In fact, because of his negative experiences with racism, hopelessness and alienation in New York, a microcosm of the United States, Julius once threatened to leave the U.S. for another country. “And I needed to get away from America from time to time, the terrible, hypocritical country, this sanctimonious country. I really can’t stand it sometimes. Do you know what I mean?”²⁹⁰ Thus, by speaking out about his distressing experiences living in America, Julius exposes not only his predicaments but the circumstances of many immigrants’ communities living in America. By talking about leaving the U.S. for another country, Julius foregrounds and complicates the nature of race relations in the country, establishing a narrative that challenges readers to think deeply about the ramifications of racism and oppression to not only African diaspora population in the U.S. but to marginalized and oppressed groups as a whole.

Not only is Julius worried by his own alienation and excruciating experiences with racism and alienation in the U.S., but he is also devastated by the horrendous conditions of his friends who are serving terms in many American prisons. The conditions of Julius’ friends in

these prisons, which he describes as “mostly silent, staring into space...no windows, and was brightly lit with fluorescent tubes, which seemed to suck into them the little remaining air,” not only underscores the traumatic conditions of Julius’ friends but it also highlights the destructive impact of systemic racism and alienation in America. The phrase “mostly silent” underscores the hopeless and desolate nature of these prisons, signifying further that African diaspora communities in the U.S.’ community in the U.S. are relegated to position of silence and despondency. Additionally, through these images, the novel explores the conditions of these immigrants and charts questions regarding alienation and racism, all of which shape the life of the novel’s protagonist, Julius, and his friends. Hence, through his friends’ atrocious conditions in these prisons, Julius is not only directing our attention to the conditions of these African diaspora population, but he is shedding light into the pervasive nature of oppression, systematic injustices and inequality in America.

The novel brings Julius entangled between his past and present realities as he struggles to make meaning out of his new life, and with the everyday people whom he associates. It is a story about racism and alienation, which complicates immigration as a process of self-discovery. Commenting, for instance, on the racial ramification of the novel, Sheila Petty argues that *Open City* is a novel that “probes questions of assimilation, disjunction from origin, and the rise of experience that supersede boundaries and cultures.”²⁹¹ The novel uses a journey motif and a stream of consciousness literary style to develop the character of Julius as he progresses through life and through a walk in the city of New York, (walking being a metaphor for life itself) in order to find himself and his place in a world so complex and so interconnected Julius calls it “fragments of dreams.”²⁹² Using the journey motif, Cole explores the life of Julius, as he travels to new realities, in order to better understand the complex world he is surrounded by.

The powerful image on page four of the novel when Cole writes that “each time I caught sight of geese swooping in formation across the sky, I wondered how our life below might look from their perspective” suggests that Julius, a black man, is nothing but an “outsider,” to the world that he lives in. This image suggests that Julius is an alienated individual, who is being constantly looked down upon by his white counterparts as they seek to undermine his existence. Hence, the image of the geese as used in the novel is a metaphor for the host communities (white Americans) as they constantly looked down upon Julius, monitoring his every move, as a means to subvert his existence. Furthermore, the image of the geese represents Julius’ entanglement and prison-like condition as he “walks aimlessly” in the city.

“My Fear of Racism”:

Another compelling evidence of racism in the novel happens when Julius constantly talks about “my fear of racism” perpetrated against him. This experience, Julius argues often gives “me a fright” and makes him look “defeated by unforeseen” circumstances. For example, commenting on the destructive impacts that racism has on him, Julius tells a disturbing story regarding the humiliation and the eventual killing of a black man in his neighborhood:

There was some kind of scuffle two hundred yards down the street, again strangely noiseless, a huddled knot of men opened up to reveal two brawlers being separated and pulled away from their fight. What I saw gave me a fright: in the far distance, beyond the listless crowd, the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree. The body was slender, dressed from head to toe in black, reflecting no light. It soon resolved itself, however, into a less ominous thing: dark canvas sheeting on a construction scaffold, twirling in the wind.²⁹³

Not too far from the area where this black man was killed, Julius faces another agonizing experience with racism. This occurred when Julius was among a gathering of white people who have invited him to participate at a concert. While at this event, Julius but does not feel

welcomed because many of the white people who attended the event hated to see him there.

Rather than feel welcomed, he feels completely ostracized. Commenting on this event, he argues:

At last a signal came from the stage, and a bush fell on the hall. Almost everyone, as almost

Always at such concerts, was white. It is something I can't help noticing; I notice it each time, and try to see past it. Part of that is a quick, complex series of negotiations: chiding myself for even seeing it, lamenting the remainders of how divided our life still remains, being annoyed that these thoughts can be counted on to pass through my mind at some point in the evening. Most of the people around me yesterday were middle-aged or old. I am used to it, but it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them.²⁹⁴

As the above quote indicate, Julius, like many of the characters in the novel, once more do not feel welcome at this event because they are black, depriving them of their American dreams and purpose in life. As a result, they feel alienated, making them feel like “outsiders.” Hence, distressing and agonizing experiences like the ones quoted above make Julius argue that “I felt an unexpected pang of my own, a sudden urgency and sorrow.”²⁹⁵ By saying that “what I saw gave me a fright,” Julius is once more pointing out the pernicious and poignant reality of racism and prejudice and their destructive impacts on African diaspora population in the U.S. Ultimately, his argument accentuates not only the toxic and pervasive nature of African diaspora and modernity in America, but it illuminates its humiliating and destructive consequences for blacks in general.

Remarking further on the racism and alienation that characters like Julius face in the U.S., Sheila argues that African diaspora population like Julius are denigrated by their host countries because of “barriers created by racist stereotypes...rejected by corrupt, African diaspora and modernity Africa and driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrant suffers psychological alienation.”²⁹⁶ By portraying the experiences of African

diaspora population in this manner, Sheila is not only uncovering the realities of the immigrants experiences, but she is also challenging existing Western construct, thereby creating an environment that places black diasporic sensibilities at the center of the novel's discourse.²⁹⁷ Sheila's treatment of Julius' experiences suggests that despite the fact of the U.S. being a country of immigrants, the U.S. is actually hostile toward immigrants. The novel's depiction of Julius as unwanted in the U.S. underscores the racial tensions that continue to exist not only between blacks and whites but among races in general.

Africans Are Culpable in their Own Predicaments:

On Saturday November the 7th, 2015, I attended a conference organized by a Nigerian Immigrants Association here in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Conference was titled *Nigeria in The 21ST Century: The Way Forward*. The primary goal of the conference was for members to reflect and discuss some of the problems facing the country and offer solutions. Not only did members raise compelling questions and had spirited debates about the problems facing the country, they also suggested solutions and the way forward if Nigeria must be relevant and competitive politically and economically in the global stage and among nations of the world in the 21st century.

Some of the issues raised at the conference included the experiences and the difficult issues confronting Nigerians in the U.S., in particular racial discrimination, modernity and oppression. The conference also focused on how we as Nigerian diaspora population can work together not only to advance our own interests, the interests of our communities, but also the interests of the United States in general. Members also discussed the lack of opportunities, especially employment opportunity among many Nigerian graduates. Bribery and corruption,

violence and lawlessness among many Nigerians, abuse of power among government officials, and a host of other issues facing the country and its people were discussed.

At the conference, members were also appalled and disappointed by the fact that decades after independence, Nigeria is still facing a barrage of problems: Nigerians are still languishing in poverty, hopelessness and living like second class citizens in their homeland. The country is not secured and there continue to exist political, religious and economic instabilities. Members also came up with several suggestions on how to fix some of these problems facing Nigeria. First, we agreed that as immigrants in the U.S., we could be a force for good for the Nigerians at home. In other words, we discussed several measures we could put in place, such as getting involved in the Nigerian political process by voting honest and decent leaders into public offices. We also suggested that corrupt, ineffective and draconian leaders must be removed from public offices and that any Nigerian leaders found guilty of embezzlement and corruption should be sentenced to jail, and all their assets seized.

Another significant issue that came up during the conference was the issue of oppression and marginalization of Nigerians both in their home country and in the U.S. Members discussed the fact that rather than meet their potentials and achieve their dreams, many Nigerians are subjected to oppression in their home country and in America. In the U.S., many Nigerian diaspora population are victims of racial discrimination and modernity. Rather than achieve the American dreams, many of these immigrants face institutional racism and modernity in the U.S. These obstacles have marginalized these Nigerian immigrants and turned them into second class citizens in America.

Like their experiences with oppression in the U.S., many Nigerians are oppressed by their leaders in their home country. In both countries, Nigerians are victims of oppression and

modernity. They are poor, hopeless and miserable and no one seems to make their lives better. Many Nigerian government officials are corrupt, ineffective and selfish. Teju Cole shed some light on these problems in *Everyday is for the Thief* when he argues that

The informal economy is the livelihood of many Lagosians. But corruption, in the form of piracy or of graft, also means that most people remain on the margins. The systems that could lift the majority out of poverty are undercut at every turn. Precisely because everyone takes a shortcut, nothing works and, for this reason, the only way to get anything done is to take another shortcut. The advantage in these situations goes to the highest bidders, those individuals most willing to pay money or to test the limits of the law.²⁹⁸

As the argument above indicates, the problems facing Nigeria is enormous and grave, and Cole seems to suggest that no form of justice, equality and freedom can be accomplished under such corrupt, oppressive, and ineffective Nigerian leadership. Desperate to leave their hopeless situations and their negative experiences in Nigeria behind, these Nigerian diaspora population want to immigrate to the U.S. in search of a better life. Regardless of the problems of racism and oppression that await them in America, these immigrants are determined to immigrate to the U.S. by all means necessary. They believe that in the U.S. they can achieve the American dreams. This explains why Julius frequently argues that he wants to be “a free man.” “I preferred freedom,” he says on many occasions.

Julius, like many of the characters portrayed in the novel, believe that their native country Nigeria has marginalized and oppressed them. They believe that in Nigeria their dreams are broken and their potential under-utilized. Expressing his frustration with his native country, Julius argues that “he could never belong in Nigeria.” He also states that “the informal economy is the livelihood of many Lagosians. But corruption, in the form of piracy or of graft, also means that most people remain on the margins.” Not only does this quote show that these Nigerians immigrants feel oppressed and marginalized in their country but it explains why they are

desperate to immigrate to the U.S. While they believe Nigeria has failed them, they are hopeful that by immigrating to the U.S. they can realize their potentials and achieve the American dreams. Ironically, rather than achieve their American dreams, these Nigerian immigrants become victims of racism, oppression and modernity.

In the end, it turns out that the American dream is a deception for these immigrants. Rather than being hopeful, they become hopeless. Rather than being champions, they become victims of African diaspora and modernity and modernity. Rather than experience freedom, they are incarcerated. Rather than attain equality, they face racial discrimination. Talking about the hopelessness and oppression he faces living in America, Julius argues that he is “alienated” and incapable of making his life “into anything meaningful” and that he feels like “an alien in the environment.” Speaking further, Julius argues “but if I may speak frankly. I’m still angry... and when I think about America—and I know that we are not supposed to say such things in America—when I think of America, I want to spit.” All these examples are indicative of Julius’ disappointments and hopelessness living in the U.S. As a means to overcome these obstacles he faces in America, Julius argues that I “was compelled to return home.”

By “return home,” Julius is referring to his homeland in Nigeria. After many years of emigrating back and forth from Nigeria to the U.S., Julius realizes that Nigeria seems to be his only hope for emancipation and freedom. It is important to realize that Julius and many characters in the novel immigrate to the U.S. in the first place because they experience too many problems and obstacles to their progress, growth and development in Nigeria. However, in the U.S., they fail because they face oppression and racial discrimination. As his last hope for self-empowerment, freedom and equality, Julius again returns to Nigeria. In these two novels, Cole depicts characters who experience many societal problems and also seek to reform them. To

illustrate, in Cole's *Open City*, Julius as an African diaspora population faces many societal obstacles, such as racial discrimination and other forms of injustices in the U.S. In the end, Julius wins and becomes a New York psychiatric doctor helping the less fortunate, the marginalized and oppressed members of the society. As this indicates, Julius' story is a story about courage, determination and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Reflecting on the obstacles that he and many other characters in the novel face living in America and how he turned his life around not only for his own benefit but also for the benefit of the sick, the less privileged and the marginalized members of the society, Julius says that “our life together here was difficult at times, abundant at other times...we served those who had less than we did, in every way we could...we cared for the sick as best as we could in those years.” Again, despite these difficulties, Julius overcomes them by empowering himself, working hard and by being courageous. “I gained a reputation for fearlessness and had developed a somewhat calloused self-confidence... coincidentally or not, I also began to do well...” As this quote demonstrates, Julius succeeds not because the U.S. society made it easy for him to do so but because he was a determined person.

Open City accentuates the agonizing conditions of African diaspora population like Julius, presenting the perspectives of racism and oppression as they struggle with various challenges in the U.S. It explores African diaspora communities in the U.S. through the eyes of Julius, and the various structural obstacles they face as they navigate the complexity of life in America. Not only does this chapter highlight the harrowing impacts of racism and oppression on the characters but it shows how the characters themselves are rejecting their negative images. Ultimately, it demonstrates how these characters find the courage to empower themselves in the midst of various structural and racial challenges they face.

Determined to get out of the predicaments facing them in their native homeland, Julius and many other characters in *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief* immigrate illegally to the U.S., only to be caught by the U.S. immigration enforcement agents and sent to prison. Nigerian leaders are also responsible for the obstacles that these immigrants face in the U.S. In his writings, Cole seems to indict Nigerian leaders and government officials for not developing their nations, creating opportunities and secured environment that would have been attractive to the Nigerian people. In other words, if these Nigerian leaders had created employment opportunities, secure environments, societal amenities and other attractive benefits in their country, these would have helped to discourage many Nigerians from immigrating to the U.S., a country where they are being dehumanized, oppressed and treated like second class citizens.

In these two fictional narratives, Cole advocates reforms. Because of his fight and criticism against racism and corruption with corrupt government officials both in Nigeria and the U.S., Cole also can be called a human rights activist. Cole is a determined and courageous fictional writer who dedicates his writings to advocating for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized Nigerians at home and African diaspora population in the U.S. Not only do Cole's writings criticize corruption and oppression with corrupt Nigerian leaders and the U.S. government officials but they also indict white Americans in the harshest terms possible for its institutional racism, hegemonic structure of power, modernity, oppression and marginalization of African diaspora communities in the U.S.' community in the U.S.

Through the unnamed protagonist in *Everyday is for the Thief* and Julius in *Open City*, we learn not only about the ingrained nature of racial injustices and oppression in the U.S. but also about Nigerian history and culture, the tensions between various ethnic groups in the country. The narrator is appalled that more than forty years after the bloody Nigerian civil war

between the Christian Ibo tribes in the East and the rest of the Nigerian population, there still exist sharp religious differences which many Nigerians continue to struggle with.

In order to restore peace and tranquility to the country, many untrained and unqualified members of the Nigerian population are employed to help fight crime, chaos, hooliganism and corruption. Commenting on these inexperienced Nigerian security operatives and their failures to solve these problems, the novel narrator argues that “it is these heavily armed and poorly paid men who are entrusted with the work of protecting the citizenry.” As this quote suggests, the obstacles facing Nigeria’s growth and development are huge and Cole seems to suggest that no one in the country, not even the Nigerian government and their representatives, are capable of fixing these massive problems because they are corrupt, ineffective and selfish.

The issue with corrupt leadership is that people are oppressed and marginalized. This is the case with many Nigerian graduates. Many Nigerians do not have employment opportunities after graduation. Their futures are bleak and their potential and expertise completely under-utilized, and in most cases wasted. As a consequence, these jobless Nigerian youths resort to armed robbery, money laundering, hooliganism, violence, thuggery and various other social vices. Commenting, for example, on the poverty and hopelessness that many Nigerians face in their homeland, Uwem Affiah in his essay *Protest, Resistance and Activism in the Drama of Osonye Onwueme* argues that many Nigerians

Spend hours in long queues in fuel stations chasing unavailable products or products which the station operators prefer to sell to black marketers. Nigerian’s politicians draw huge salaries/allowances while salaries paid to civil servants is pathetic. Power shortage and outage is a routine and Nigeria is today the world’s largest importer of power generating sets. Fresh, clean, portable water is a scarce commodity; hospitals are mere consulting clinics; school laboratories are without reagents, libraries without books and classrooms are insufficient... Therefore, while the leaders live in obscene opulence and affluence, the masses live in abject poverty.²⁹⁹

Sadly, these problems did not happen by accident. They are problems perpetrated by oppressive, corrupt and fraudulent Nigerian leaders. In other words, these problems confronting Nigeria are self-inflicted wounds. Hence, no one should be blamed but the Nigerians themselves.

It is important to know that the problem with African countries like Nigeria is not that it is a poor country because of lack of natural and human resources. This, in fact, is the opposite. Commenting, for example, on the abundance of wealth and natural resources in Nigeria and their mismanagement by corrupt leaders, Uwem argues that the country is

The largest economy in West Africa. The underperforming manufacturing sector is the 3rd in Africa led only by South Africa and Egypt. The GDP per capital is USD 2, 500/person as of 2011 and economists believe that Nigeria has the potential to become one of the 20 largest economies in the world by 2025. It is a major producer of crude oil (OPEC member) and ranked 12th supplier of oil with a production capacity of 2.2 million barrels per day. Despite its wealth, critics argue that Nigeria has sadly been mismanaged and plundered by the ruling class. Besides, 57% of its population lives below the poverty line and 25% of its working population is unemployed. Inflation runs at over 11% and its foreign reserves stands at \$33 billion, down from \$46 billion in 2009. Nigeria suffers what economists refer to as the ‘resource curse.’ The symptoms of ‘resources curse’ are an abundance natural resources, leading to enormous wealth, which fuels official corruption and as a corollary, a violent competition for the commonwealth by the citizenry³⁰⁰

As the above quote indicates, Nigeria is not poor because the country lacks natural resources.

The country is poor and the people impoverished because of bad leadership, mismanagement, corruption and abuse of power. By drawing attention to these problems confronting the country and its people, Uwem not only sheds light onto these problems, but he wants us to understand their devastating consequences for the marginalized and oppressed Nigerian population.

In the two novels, Cole seems to suggest that the problems facing Nigeria are not caused by anyone else but the Nigerians themselves along with their corrupt and ineffective leaders. Many Nigerians are brought up in these crises facing their country and many do not want to live

in these conditions for ever. They are frustrated with living in a country besieged by corruption, oppression and a country where they cannot achieve their dreams. As a result, these Nigerian are desperate to immigrate to the U.S., a country where they believe they can achieve their American dreams. These Nigerians also believe that the U.S. is an ‘Eldorado’ and a ‘promise land.’ For example, in *Open City*, before he even immigrates to the U.S., Julius argues that “I will be successful” in America. This statement suggests that Julius is very hopeful about achieving the American dreams when he arrives in the country.

Like Ifemelu in *Americanah*, Julius and many characters in *Open City* wrongly bought into the promise of American dreams, only to be let down by oppression and racial discrimination. Also, like Ifemelu, Julius realizes that much of the information he was told in his native country about America is misleading. For example, another Nigerian immigrant had told Julius about the promise of the American dreams and how successful he is living in America. “I am successful now, he said, America has made a life possible for me and for my wife and children. My daughter is doing graduate studies in engineering at MIT, and our youngest is at Yale. But, if I may speak frankly, I’m still angry. We lost so much.”³⁰¹

In addition to being told about the promise of the American dreams, Julius has also learned on television back in his home country that the U.S. is full of “bright lights and beautiful shops, the housing projects and luxury hotels...the sun-brightened plaza at Columbus Circle” Like many African diaspora communities in the U.S., Julius bought into this argument. Sadly, his American dreams turned into a deception. Rather than achieve the promise of the American dreams, he becomes a victim of racial discrimination and oppression. Like Ifemelu in *Americanah*, Julius also realizes that appearance is not necessarily reality and that immigrating to the US is not necessarily a passport to prosperity. His regrets and frustration with immigrating to

the U.S. explains why he argues that his American experience “was a disappointment in this regard.”³⁰²

Commenting on the miseries and disappointments many immigrants like Julius face in foreign countries like the U.S., Reuben Abati in his book *Trapped: A Compendium of Issues on Illegal Migration and Human Trafficking* argues that

In their new homes they lose personal experience and self-respect, they are relegated to become second-class citizens and become unnecessarily enslaved. They are not able to secure respectable jobs, nor can they create a career that will see them into their future. Rather, they engage in menial, degrading jobs around the clock. Their academic qualifications become of no consequence in the face of segregation and racial bias. They have unfortunately reached the point of no return; the future appears bleak and retracing their steps back home appears an improbable solution. They are already in a big dilemma.³⁰³

The above quote suggests once more that immigrating to the U.S. is not a passport to growth and prosperity. As portrayed in Julius’ immigration experience in *Open City*, it is a ticket to racial discrimination, oppression and hopelessness. The reality of life for immigrants like Julius is they become second class citizens in America, making Sheila Petty to argue that “black subjects formed by the failure of emancipation to deliver true equality, the black migrant is placed in a position of anticipating full liberation, only to have it denied by systemic prejudices embedded in a system that refuses him status.”³⁰⁴

Desperate to immigrate to the U.S., a place they see as a promise land, and a country where they believe they can achieve their American dreams, these Nigerian immigrants would do anything no matter how difficult they are in order to get their Visa and other immigration documents. Commenting, for example, on the agonies and frustrations many Nigerian immigrants face at the U.S. Consular offices in Nigeria before being granted or denied immigration documents to the U.S, the narrator argues that in addition to waiting in line for long

hours, even days, waiting for their immigration documents, these immigrants are also exploited and abused financially by the U.S. immigration officials. Talking to his Nigerian friend not only about the delay he experiences seeking U.S. Visa at the U.S. Consulate in Nigeria, the condescending and disparaging manner Nigerian immigrants seeking U.S. Visa are treated by U.S. immigration agents, but also the pervasive nature of corruption in the U.S. immigration system, the novel narrator says:

And I got mine in a week. Of Course, the expediting fee is unofficial. They are crooks, you see, these people. They take the money order, which they don't give you a receipt for, and they deposit it in the account and they take out cash from the account. That's for their own pockets. He makes a swift pulling motion with his hands, like someone opening drawer. It is what I have dreaded: a direct run-in with graft. I have mentally rehearsed a reaction for a possible encounter with such corruption at the airport in Lagos. But to walk in off a New York street and face a brazen demand for a bribe: that is a shock I am ill-prepared for.³⁰⁵

The above quote indicates the severe nature of corruption and abuse in the U.S. immigration and justice system. Furthermore, not only does their excruciating experiences seeking U.S. Visa underscore the agonies and pain that African diaspora communities in the U.S. go through but it accentuates the ingrained nature of abuse of power, corruption and modernity among the U.S. immigration agents and by extension the U.S. society.

As a result of these Nigerians massive exodus out of the country, the country continues to suffer many obstacles, including technological backwardness and inability to utilize its human and natural resources. Commenting on some of the problems facing Nigeria and Nigerians as a result of many people moving out of the country, John Toluhi in his essay *Government* argues that

Nigeria is a nation where the citizens have not reached a level of growth commensurate with its resources. Resources are not properly allocated, there exists inequality in the pattern of growth, distribution of resources and prevalence of illiteracy. Nigeria continues to witness economic crises technological backwardness, the country is not able to optimally utilize its human, material and financial resources to improve the conditions of living of the people by providing

for their needs in the right quantity and quality. There is instability in government and the poor quality of leadership provided by political leaders is an indicator of underdevelopment. There is low per capital income, a low life expectancy, poor and insufficient medical services, hunger and starvation.³⁰⁶

As the above quote indicates, Nigeria is a country besieged by all kinds of crises and underdevelopment problems. Mismanagement and corruption by government officials continue to be major setbacks for the nation. Unfortunately, these crises continue to cause many Nigerian immigrants to immigrate to the U.S., a country where they face oppression and racial discrimination.

If Nigerian immigrants themselves and their leaders had invested in their country, created a better nation, and a more just and promising society, where Nigerians can realize their dreams and reach their potentials, these Nigerian immigrants will not be so desperate to immigrate to the U.S. Unfortunately, Nigerian political elites and government officials, whose responsibility it is to develop their country and make it a more attractive place, have failed miserably. Some of the responsibilities of leaders as illustrated in the above quote are to provide security and safety environment for their citizens, create opportunities for growth and development, provide social welfare and create an environment where everyone can realize their dreams and reach their potential. Sadly, this is not the case with Nigerian leaders.

Rather than invest in the growth and development of their country, they mismanage and squandered the country's abundant natural and human resources. Their failure to create a better Nigerian society, where there is justice and equality for all, is fueling these Nigerians desperate attempts to immigrate to the U.S. Given these reasons, Nigerian immigrants and Nigerian leaders should blame no one but themselves for the crises facing their country. In other words, the real

culprit in the predicaments facing Nigerians in their home country and in the U.S. are they themselves and their corrupt and irresponsible government officials.

The pervasive nature of social, religious and political instabilities in Nigeria leads the novel narrator to argue that the Nigerian “system that could lift the majority out of poverty are undercut at every turn. Precisely because everyone takes a short cut, nothing works and, for this reason, the only way to get anything done is to take another shortcut.”³⁰⁷ Commenting further on the ingrained nature of bribery and corruption in Nigeria, the novel narrator argues that:

Money, dished out in quantities fitting the context, is a social lubricant. It eases passage even as it maintains hierarchies. Fifty naira for the man who helps you back out from the parking spot, two hundred naira for the police officer who stops you for no good reason in the dead of night, ten thousand for the clearing agent who helps you bring your imported crate through customs. For each transaction, there is a suitable amount that helps things on their way. No one else seems to worry, as I do, that that money demanded by someone whose finger hovers over the trigger of AK-47 is less a tip than a ransom. I feel that my worrying about it is a luxury that few can afford. For many Nigerians, the giving and receiving of bribes, tips, extortion money, or alms—the categories are fluid—is not thought of in moral terms. It is seen either as a mild irritant or as an opportunity. It is a way of getting things done, neither more nor less than what is there for.”

In Nigeria, the book narrator also faces many Nigerian youths who specialize in fraud and money laundering activities because of the problem of unemployment. These unemployed Nigerian youths who commit to money laundering and internet scams are called “yahoo yahoo” boys. Commenting on the negative impacts of these criminal activities, the novel narrator posits that “the availability of computers is...an index of progress. But while India is an emerging software player, and countries like China, Indonesia, and Thailand have successfully staked claims in manufacturing, Nigeria’s contribution is much more modest. In fact, it is, for now, limited to the repetition of a single creative misuse of the internet: advance free fraud.”

Not only do these Lagos youths steal and break the laws but they also collect millions of dollars mostly from their foreign victims. Commenting once more on this problem, Cole argues that the “informal economy is the livelihood of many Lagosians. But corruption, in the form of piracy or of graft, also means that most people remain on the margins... The advantage in these situations goes to the highest bidders, those individuals most willing to pay money or to test the limits of the law.” Corruption and abuse of power are not the only societal ills the book narrator experiences, he also faces massive disorderliness, lawlessness and pandemonium perpetrated by jobless and angry Nigerians. In other words, he witnesses various kinds of violent incidents, such as lynching, road rage, armed robbery, assaults and mugging. In addition to all these problems, the narrator also sees a countless number of handicapped and disabled people on the streets of major Nigerian cities, towns and villages. These incapacitated people are marginalized and oppressed by the Nigerian government who pretend this oppressed population does not exist.

Again, rather than help their people out of poverty, provide them with the assistance they deserve, independence and employment opportunities, they are neglected by the corrupt Nigerian government officials and left to die in the streets. Commentating on these appalling and heartbreaking conditions of these Nigerians on the streets of Lagos, the narrator explains that “there is much sorrow, not only of the dramatic kind but also in the way that difficult economic circumstances wear people down, eroding them, preying on their weakness, until they do things that they themselves find hateful, until they are shadows of their best selves.”

As the above analysis from Cole’s *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief* indicates, Nigeria is apparently a country fraught and besieged by all kinds of social, political, economic, religious crises and instabilities. However, Nigerians must not hold anyone but themselves responsible for these social, religious, political and economic crises destroying their country. In

other words, Nigerians must take responsibility for the predicaments and catastrophe facing their country. This is because Nigerian leaders are able to contribute to the growth and development of their country if they manage the country's natural and human resources judiciously and ethically. Sadly, this is not the case.

Rather than invest in their country, provide employment opportunities and other attractive benefits to their citizens, these Nigerian leaders squander and misuse these human and natural resources. With many job opportunities, security and other social amenities, many Nigerians desperate to immigrate to the U.S. would have been forced to stay in their homeland.

Commenting on the pervasive nature of corruption, mismanagement and oppression among Nigerian government officials and their devastating consequences for the Nigerian people, the novel narrator argues that

Cash has to change hands, that's the way of the world. Only in excessive cases, like that of the recently convicted inspector general of police, it is viewed as a blights on the system. Tafa Balogun's stolen billions deprived many policemen of their livelihood, and this is part, though not all, of the reason they in their turn extort drivers. Yet, the complaint that most people have is not that Balogun stole money. That a high-ranking government official would embezzle public funds is a given. What annoys people is that he stole so quickly. The reasoning was that if only he had shown some moderation, taking only a little here and there, he would not have been arrested.³⁰⁸

The quote above demonstrates the pervasive nature of corruption and mismanagement among Nigerian government officials. Again, if these Nigerian government officials had used the country's resources in ethical and honest manners and for the benefit of their citizens, many of these Nigerians who want to desperately leave the country for the U.S. would not have been so desperate to do so.

Apart from the fact that many Nigerian leaders are corrupt and incompetent, African diaspora communities in the U.S. to countries like the U.S. are also destroying their home

countries because they refuse to stay and contribute meaningfully and positively to the growth and development of their country. As the novel narrator argues, Julius leaving his Nigerian homeland for the U.S., “people like him should return home and make it better.” Sadly, like Julius, many characters in the novel decide not to stay and build their home countries. Rather, they immigrate to the U.S. where they hope to improve their lives, achieve their potential and attain the American dreams. In the U.S., where they dream of better lives, freedom and job opportunities, their dreams turn into deceptions. They are subjected to hopelessness, racial discrimination and their American dreams completely turned into a deception. Using the experiences of these communities, Cole in *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief* not only indicts American racism, oppression and modernity in the harshest term possible but he calls attention to the fact that the U.S. is an Eldorado, a promise land, as many African diaspora communities in the U.S. believe.

In Nigeria, this unnamed narrator continues to witness the predicaments of the Nigerian people, their tribulations and frustrations not only at the hands of their corrupt and selfish government officials but also at the hands of the U.S. customs and immigration officials. In the novel, Cole seems to suggest that these U.S. immigration agents are corrupt and uncompassionate to Nigerian seeking immigration documents. Through explaining the plights of many Nigerian youths who are desperate to travel out of Nigeria to the United States for a better future and new opportunities, we are informed not only of the downfall of the Nigerian societies, the desperations and hopelessness that many Nigerians seeking U.S. passports undergo, but also the exploitative nature of the United States Immigration and Customs officials.

Shedding some light onto how exploitation and corruption are deeply ingrained into the fabric of the Nigerian communities and among the U.S immigration service officials, Julius, the novel protagonist argues:

Yes, but isn't it this casual complicity that sunk our country so deep into woes? The question, unspoken, hangs in the air between me and my interlocutor. It isn't until past eleven that my number is finally called. The story is exactly as he has put it to me. There is an expediting fee of fifty-five dollars in addition to the actual eighty-five dollars that the passports costs. The payment has to be in two separate money orders. I leave the building for the second time that morning, to go and buy another money order. I walk quickly, and am exhausted by the time I return at quarter to twelve, fifteen minutes before closing of the window and submit my form with the required fees. Abdul tells me to pick my passport up in a week. He gives me a receipt only for the original fee. I take it mutely, fold it up, and put it in my pocket. On my way out, next to the elevators, there's a partially torn sign that reads: Helps us fight corruption. If any employee of the Consulate asks you for a bribe or tip, please let us know.³⁰⁹

Not only does the above quote underscore the desperate manner these African diaspora population are seeking to immigrate to the U.S for better lives but it points our attention to the corruption, dehumanization and the exploitation taking place among the U.S immigration officials in Nigeria. In other words, knowing that these African diaspora communities in the U.S. are desperate to leave their country for the U.S., these U.S. immigration agents abuse and take advantage of these vulnerable immigrants. Once more, this brings to light the rampant nature of corruption in the U.S. immigration system.

Essentially, *Every Day is for the Thief* underscores the political, social and economic problems that continue to overwhelm Nigeria as a nation. It also illuminates the ingrained nature of corruption in the U.S. immigration and justice system. In the novel, Cole seems to suggest that as a result of the problems confronting Nigeria, the Nigerian peoples' choices and opportunities

in life are limited. As a result, they are forced to immigrate to the U.S., for better opportunities. Sadly, those opportunities are often unrealistic and unattainable.

What is unique about this unknown Nigerian immigrant described in *Everyday Is for the Thief* is that he is one of the few immigrants who decides to move back to his homeland in Nigeria after several years of living in the U.S., a representation obviously grounded in Cole's belief in the back to Africa movement. How this unnamed writer survives in Nigeria, a country he visited for the first time, what his experiences are going to be, the challenges he will face, how the native Nigerians are going to receive him, and whether or not he will return to the United States after facing horrors and disappointments in Nigeria, a country of his birth, are some of the questions the book leaves unanswered.

In *Every day is for the Thief*, Cole again directs his criticisms toward these African diaspora communities in the U.S. for buying into this unrealistic American dreams. Cole also criticizes Nigerian leaders for not developing the country enough for their people to stay there. Rather than make Nigeria attractive and create opportunities for their people, these Nigerian leaders squandered the country's resources, thereby making life extremely difficult for their people. As a mean to escape these crises and lack of opportunities in their homeland, many Nigerians immigrate to the U.S., where they hope their dreams can be realized and their potential achieved. For instance, in *Open City*, the protagonist Julius and many characters in the novel immigrate to the U.S. as a means to escape the crises and the lack of economic opportunities that have besieged their country. Ironically, in the U.S., they experience oppression, racial discrimination and hopelessness. They became victims of racism and modernity not only because white Americans are oppressive and cruel to these immigrants but also because these immigrants chose to subject themselves to these condition in the first place.

To clarify, Julius like other characters in *Open City* broke the U.S. immigration laws by entering the country illegally. In other words, they understand the consequences of breaking the U.S. laws but that did not prevent them from entering the country illegally. This was their own choice. No one forced them into making this decision. They made this decision completely on their own. For this reason, these African diaspora population have no one to blame but themselves. While I am not excusing the condescending, racist and oppressive manners these immigrants are treated by law enforcement agents in America, these immigrants would not have been exposed to these hostile conditions if they had not broken the U.S. laws.

If these African diaspora communities in the U.S. had stayed in their home countries and if they had not immigrated to the U.S. illegally, no U.S immigration agents would have humiliated nor put them in prison. These immigrants would also not have experienced racial discrimination and modernity as they did in America if they had stayed in their African homelands. Their immigrating to the U.S., therefore, plays a major role in their hopelessness, failures and disappointments. They could have stayed back in their native countries and develop these places rather than immigrating to the U.S. These African countries need people like Julius and many of the characters in the novel to grow and develop. By leaving their underdeveloped home countries behind for a developed country like the U.S., these African diaspora population are creating more problems for their respective countries.

It is important to realize that one of the problems that occurs when these African diaspora communities in the U.S. leave their home countries for the U.S. is “brain drain.” Brain drain problems occur when professionals and human resources from Africa move to advanced countries like the U.S. Brain drain is terrible and negative for the African continent as a whole for many reasons. One of these is that it leads to the emigration of professionals and intelligent

Africans to other countries for better working conditions, better pay and various other attractive incentives and benefits.

The negative effects of brain drain on the African continent is that these intelligent and professional people are no longer available to develop the continent and make it a better place. In his book, *A Unique Migration*, Peter Arnold argues that African “migration, including the brain drain of health professionals, has been increasing exponentially during the 20th century, with no sign of diminishing in the 21st...International movement in a globalized world is also attractive for those who have skills which are welcome elsewhere, of which the English Language is very important.”³¹⁰ Commenting further on the negative impacts of “brain drain” on African, Ainalem Tabeje in his essay *Brain Drain and Capacity Building in Africa* argues that

Brain drain in Africa has financial, institutional, and societal costs. African countries get little return from their investment in higher education, since too many graduates leave or fail to return home at the end of their studies. In light of a dwindling professional sector, African institutions are increasingly dependent on foreign expertise. To fill the human resource gap created by brain drain, Africa employs up to 150,000 expatriate professionals at a cost of US\$4 billion a year. The departure of health professionals has eroded the ability of medical and social services in several sub-Saharan countries to deliver even basic health and social needs.³¹¹

As the above quote shows, the fact that many Nigerians are leaving their homeland for the U.S. is a negative thing. It is negative because their moving out of the country causes the country to lose human capital, leading to poverty, underdevelopment and decline in the country’s development and growth.

Conclusion:

Though the struggle of Nigerian immigrants like Julius, Saidu and many other characters in the novel remain dismal in the U.S., their experiences serve to reinforce Cole’s message: Both

Open City and *Every day is for the Thief* underscore the predicaments that Nigerian immigrants face as a result of these Nigerians buying too much into the ideas that only by immigrating to the U.S. can they reach their potential and achieve the American dreams. For African diaspora population like me and the authors, the American Dreams means the promise of equality, justice and freedom. Unlike in African where citizens are alienated, dehumanized and disenfranchised, many African diaspora communities in the U.S. come to the U.S. in hopes of self-empowerment, self-fulfillment and freedom. Sadly, these immigrants' struggle to achieve the American Dreams often turn into a deception. Using a African diaspora and modernity framework, Cole exposes the working of the American system and the failure of the American Dreams as a means to empower not only African diaspora communities in the U.S. but other immigrants' communities worldwide.

Knowing that the American Dreams is unrealistic for many immigrants' communities, many African diaspora communities in the U.S. are now denouncing and rejecting the American values. In other words, these immigrants are now less inclined to immigrate to America since they realize that the American is a deception. For those African diaspora population who are now in the U.S., many are looking for ways return to their ancestral homelands in Africa, the same way characters like Julius in *Open City* and Ifemelu in *Americanah* did. Ultimately, through his novels, Cole essentially dismisses and debunks these myth of the American Dreams, instead affirming the notion that immigrating to the U.S. can be a ticket to alienation, hopelessness and entrapment.

As shown in the novels, for example, these Nigerian immigrants' characters come to the U.S. voluntarily as economic refugees or middle class people desiring the American dreams. Sadly, the American dreams they seek turns into a deception because they buy into the notion

that the U.S. is an 'Eldorado' and a 'promise land.' Cole's exploration of the negative experiences of these immigrants helps to reinforce the conversation on the American dreams, the failure by Nigerian immigrants to achieve these dreams, and the unrealistic expectations of these immigrants in America.

In addition to problematizing and challenging the American dreams and the idea that the U.S. is a promise land, the novels also illuminate conversation about systemic racial order and oppression. Cole uses the novels as a means to call attention to the subordination and marginalization of Nigerians both at home and in the U.S. Ultimately, Cole uses these novels to not only question the roles and place of Nigerian immigrants but also to ask if these immigrants are treated the right way and, most importantly, if their human rights are being denied and undermined by white Americans.

In addition to questioning and problematizing African diaspora and modernity and marginalization of Nigerian diaspora population at home and in the U.S., Cole is also using these novels to question the roles of Nigerians themselves in shaping and influencing their own future. In other words, Cole's novels serve to accentuate the role of these marginalized and oppressed Nigerians in the formation and building of their own country and future. The most important objective of Cole, therefore, is to assert that no one but the Nigerians themselves can save their country from corruption, political and economic instabilities. This notion explains why many characters in the novel decide to return to their native country in Nigeria. In essence, Cole's aim to stress the power, presence and ability of Nigerian immigrants who are capable of changing the image of their country positively.

The conclusion of the novel accentuates Cole's message, a message about immigrant's fiction's indictment of white American African diaspora and modernity and various forms of

modernity. It is also a post-African diaspora and modernity message about Nigerian immigrants embracing their own roots. Through his novels, Cole wants Nigerian immigrants to embrace their roots while rejecting American lifestyles and traditions. That is, *Open City* is a novel about empowerment and perseverance in the face of massive structural challenges and systemic racism African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius face. For instance, the fact that Julius, the novel's protagonist, returns back to his homeland in Africa after many years of living in the U.S., signifies Cole's rejection of American culture and values and his embracement of his African roots.

The next chapter focuses on the failure of the American dream, and modernity on the African diaspora population not only in the United States but in bigger cities like Brussels. The chapter examines the experiences of these populations with alienation and hopelessness, exacerbated by global modernity and capitalism. While the previous chapter focuses on Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief* and the impacts of African diaspora and modernity domination, modernity, "African diaspora and modernity," and corruption in Nigeria and in the United States, this chapter focuses exclusively on Cole's *Open City* and his efforts to unmask not only the workings of American oppression and African diaspora and modernity but also the alienation, racism and hopelessness that these immigrants face in the country. The chapter will also uncover the apparatus that embolden and promote these factors and these immigrants' response to them.

Chapter Five:

Losing Selfness: Diaspora Experience and Failure of African Dreams of America in *Open City*

The essence of capitalism is to turn nature into commodities and commodities into capital. The live green earth is transformed into dead gold bricks, with luxury items for the few and toxic slag heaps for the many. The glittering mansion overlooks a vast sprawl of shanty towns, where in a desperate, demoralized humanity is kept in line with drugs, television, and armed forces.

.....Michael Parenti. *Against Empire*

The American Dreams is a phrase that is embedded in American society. It is commonly used in economic, social, political, and cultural settings... Although it means different things to different people, for the average American it represents a possibility of success, especially an economic success, measured, in general, by an upward mobility. The American dreams is about possibilities afforded to one to be able to achieve the necessary resources in order to move upwardly in society.

..... Moore, Ami. *The American Dreams Through The Eyes of Black African diaspora communities in the U.S. in Texas.*

Teju Cole critiques in *Open City* not only the disappointing reality of African dreams of American, the alienating and unrealistic expectations of the U.S. capitalist system and African diaspora and modernity, systemic racial order and oppression but it also uses the African dreams as a lens to understand the complexity of diaspora experience. The novel explores the pernicious impacts of African diaspora and modernity in general, and African diaspora and modernity's racism on the marginalized and oppressed populations, in particular African diaspora population in the United States, and other racial groups in the country, including the exploited white population. Cole employs the trope of migration to depict the experiences of several racial groups in the United States, in particular African diaspora communities, and these immigrants

struggle to achieve the American dreams in a country where they are often scapegoated and marginalized.

Open City focuses on many characters, in particular the novel protagonist, Julius. Like many of the characters portrayed in the novel, Julius came to the United States from Nigeria in search of a better life. Like many immigrants who bought into the promise of the American dreams, Julius believes that by coming to the U.S., he can become a rich, happy and successful person. Sadly, while attending school in New York City, he is constantly berated and subjected to racial slur, oppression and intolerance by his peers and many of the people he encounters. Rather than achieve reach his American dreams, he becomes a victim of African diaspora and modernity, structural injustices and hegemonic structure of power. He is silenced, dehumanized, marginalized and disenfranchised. His condition in America remains hopeless and his future appears bleak as a result of the many obstacles that he faces living in the U.S. Despite his experience with institutional racism and injustice, however, Julius is determined in his efforts to succeed and graduate with a medical degree from a New York University. Julius experience is emblematic of the challenges facing many immigrants and preventing them from achieving their American dreams.

In the novel, Cole portrays his characters' journey to achieve the American dreams, from the alienation they encounter in their native country through a sequence of hurdles, pain and loneliness. The novel focuses on characters like Julius and Saidu, the obstacles they face as they struggle to adjust into the country where they are alienated and marginalized. For example, during an encounter with a white police officer, the epitome of American African diaspora and modernity/capitalism, racism and oppression, Julius and many of the characters in the novel are treated unjustly and dehumanized by being kept in prison indefinitely just for breaking the U.S.

immigration laws, making Julius to argue that he felt like a “failure,” “defeated” and that “I felt disappointed in this regard.” As a result of his negative experiences at the hands of the white immigration officers, Julius also talks about “the solitary territory my mind had been crisscrossing.”³¹²

With this background in mind, this chapter accomplishes two goals. First, it uses African dreams of America as a lens to understand the complexity of the diaspora experience, while accentuating the novel’s relationship to “African diaspora and modernity” in general. What is Cole saying about African diaspora and modernity and how is he saying it? What are the impacts of African diaspora and modernity on not only African diaspora communities in the U.S., other immigrants’ communities in the U.S., but also white Americans? Is African diaspora and modernity helping or hurting people, and in particular African diaspora population? What are the calamitous impacts of African diaspora and modernity on the oppressed and marginalized population, including white Americans? What are the factors that sustained African diaspora and modernity and how repressive is it on these the oppressed communities? How are these immigrants’ communities responding to their experience with African diaspora and modernity and hegemonic structure of power?

The second objective of the novel is to analyze African diaspora and modernity’s racism. How is the modern society racist? Are there modernity working against these marginalized and oppressed populations in the U.S.? What are the institutions that sustain these African diaspora communities’ experience, injustices and how are they maintained? What are the impacts of African diaspora and modernity’s racism on the marginalized members of the first world society’s, especially the U.S.? For example, Julius argues that he continues to feel like an “alien in the environment.”³¹³ He also continues to talk about being “defeated by unforeseen changes”

and how “I was stunned into momentary confusion, as if I had been told something that wasn’t possible.”³¹⁴ The above quotes are all indicative of the alienation Julius faces in this Mega city, New York, the symbol of African diaspora and modernity.

In my interview with Teju Cole on February the 3rd 2016, during the readings and conversations about his books at Lensic Performing Arts Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Cole affirms that not only *Open City* but his other writings are about the systemic oppression in the society, institutional racism, the fragmentation of capitalism and African diaspora and modernity, and their calamitous consequences for the oppressed and marginalized members of the society, like the characters in his novels. “Yes, definitely, *Open City* and many of my writings are not only about the pervasive nature of modernity, oppression and institutional racism in our societies but they also explore the experiences of the marginalized and oppressed members of our capitalist and modern societies, and many of my characters are victims of these oppressive and dehumanizing capitalist system”³¹⁵ was Cole’s response when I asked him about the roles of racism, African diaspora and modernity and capitalism in his books.

In the novel, Cole seems to have a critique of a disintegrating first world society in general. To illustrate, the novel’s protagonist’s phrases regarding his alienation and hopelessness living in the U.S, such as when he says he felt the “the absence of order...the absence of cold when it ought to be cold..., I sensed a sudden discomfort, we walked in silence...and defeated by unforeseen forces..., I felt an unexpected pang of my own, a sudden urgency and sorrow...” are all indicative of the fragmentation and broken reality of not only African diaspora and modernity, the capitalism system, the American society but also first world societies in general.

African Dreams and the Complexity of Diaspora Experience

While characters like Julius immigrate to the U.S. to escape the anguish in their native countries and in search of the American dreams, they are alienated and rejected by oppressive immigration agents who represents African diaspora and modernity and capitalism. Like many characters in the novel, Julius' sense of alienation and hopelessness in Nigeria compels him to immigrate to America. His pursuit of the American dreams underscores the desperation by many African diaspora population in the U.S., which motivate them to seek a 'Promise Land,' an 'Eldorado,' and a more fulfilling and empowering life in America.

Commenting on the tribulations and predicaments he faced in his native country and why he decided to move to America, one of the characters in the novel named Pierre argues that "I came here when things got bad there, when so many people were killed, blacks and whites. The killings were endless, there were bodies in the streets, my cousin, the son of my mother's sister, and his entire family were slaughtered. We had to leave because the future was uncertain. We would have been targeted, that was almost certain, and who knows what else might have happened. As it got worse, Mr. Bernard's wife, who had relatives here, said, enough is enough, we must leave for New York"³¹⁶ This character's story once again underscores the reasons why many African diaspora population decide to immigrate to the U.S. Sadly, rather than self-empowerment and euphoria, these immigrant's journey to America result in defeat and agony and their chances of realizing the American dreams end in failure and alienation.

Cole's *Open City* tells the story of African diaspora communities who immigrate to the U.S. in search of better economic opportunities and the American dreams. Julius, Pierre, Saidu and many of the characters portrayed in the novel immigrate to the U.S. because they are frustrated and disappointed by the oppression and the hopeless economic situations in their native countries. In America, they expect to achieve the American dreams and reach their

potential. According to Juliette Bartlett, they immigrate to America to attempt to heal on an individual level their experiences with “apathy and abandonment, which on a larger scale is indicative of many black American families.” Bartlett argues further that their “journey to wholeness from feelings of alienation is fraught with conflicts, crises, and obstacles...”³¹⁷

These characters are rendered hopeless and marginalized not only because they face African diaspora and modernity but also because of African diaspora and modernity and capitalism. Commenting on capitalism and its calamitous impacts not only African diaspora population but Americans in general, Michel Parenti in his book *Against Empire* argues that capitalism

Systemically accumulates capital through organized exploitation of labor and the penetration of overseas markets. Capitalist imperialism invests in other countries, dominating their economies, cultures, and political life, and integrating their productive structures into an international system of capital accumulation. A central imperative of capitalism is expansion. Investors will not put their money into business ventures unless they can extract more than they invest. Increased earnings come only with growth in the enterprise. The capitalist ceaselessly searches for ways of making more money in order to make still more money. One must always invest to realize profits, gathering as much strength as possible in the face of competing and unpredictable markets.³¹⁸

The above quote suggests that the devastating reality of African diaspora and modernity/capitalism allow the marginalization and oppression of not only African diaspora population in the U.S. but also other racial groups, including white Americans.

The novel focuses on the fragmentation, hollowness and the unrealistic nature of not only the American dreams but also African diaspora and modernity and the American capitalist system. The book explores not only African diaspora communities in the U.S. but the experiences of other racial groups, including white Americans, who are also oppressed and marginalized by the exploitative and dehumanizing capitalist system and African diaspora and modernity. For example, the novel’s narrator argument: “but corruption, in the form of piracy or

a graft, also means that most people remain on the margins. The systems that could lift the majority out of poverty are undercut at every turn”³¹⁹ underscores my arguments that the book is about the fragmentation, the disappointing and broken reality of modern society, and the devastating consequences for the marginalized characters in the novel.

This ingrained nature of modernity and racism in America means that African diaspora population like Julius will continue to experience racial discrimination and oppression if nothing is done to rectify these problems. Commenting on the devastating impacts of capitalism and African diaspora and modernity, racism, alienation and the separations that continue to exist between whites and blacks like himself in the U.S., Julius explains:

And so I proceeded among the whites, entering their quieter street life, feeling for minutes that I was the only person walking around a depopulated world, and reassured only by occasional signs of life: an old lady at the end of the block carrying a bag of groceries, a pair of neighbors in conversation in front of an apartment building, and the appearance, one after the other, of glimmering lights from within the windows of lovely brick houses set back from the street.³²⁰

Julius’ statement above underscores not only the racial separation that continues to exist between races, especially blacks and whites, in the U.S. but it shows the systemic racism that continue to exist in the country and how African diaspora and modernity continue to create oppressions and divisions among racial groups in America.

Through my analysis of the novel, I realized that the interdependence of institutional racism, capitalism and African diaspora and modernity, global market and postmodernism, economic, and political marginalization, structural injustices, all of which are deep-rooted in the U.S., aggravate African diaspora population subjugation and underrepresentation in America, weakening their ability to accomplish their American dreams. My argument is that, although racism is central to Cole's *Open City*, it is not the only issue he addresses in the novel. The novel

speaks to broader issues as well, including the deception aspects of the dreams, the devastating impacts of African diaspora and modernity. For example, Julius' statement that "the future was uncertain" and that "no one in the train talks to each other" suggest that the novel is not about race alone. In other words, Cole's indictment of American society is beyond race. "No one" talks.

My critical intervention is that race is not the sole horizon of interpretation for Cole's argument in this novel. He also seems to be suggesting that the system does not work for other racial groups and even for White Americans as well? In other words, Cole is also indicting not only the racist but the capitalist system in first world countries like the U.S., the global market economy, which has devalued, dehumanized and commodify human lives, the fragmentation aspects of the American dreams, all of which have become characteristics of the modern American society. One of the characters, Pierre's statement that "the society is changing...the houses were bigger then and many people needed servants. Yes, some people worked in terrible conditions, I know, inhuman conditions" is suggestive not only of the damaging impacts of African diaspora and modernity but also the unrealistic nature of the American dreams.

On page 92 of the novel, Julius, the novel's protagonist, completely disappointed by capitalism, African diaspora and modernity and the failure of the American dreams, expresses his frustrations and hopelessness living in the country. "And I needed to get away from America from time to time, this terrible, hypocritical country, this sanctimonious country. I really can't stand it sometimes." What this means is that in order to make significant progress and realize their dreams, African diaspora communities in the U.S. must abandon capitalism and other economic systems that favor the few and marginalize the majority. That is, the American capitalist dreams is a deception.

The only way these group of African diaspora population can empower themselves and live fulfilling lives is by not only believing in themselves but also by investing in their own countries, because at the end of the day the “American Dreams” is delusional discourse to begin with. This explains why Julius describes “America as a hypocritical country.” What Julius is saying in essence is that the American dreams is a dreams built on false hope. It is a trap for those who are foolish enough to buy into it. They are both fooled by it and buy into it because that delusion satisfies some problematic desire within themselves.

My intervention is that African diaspora population cannot make significant progress nor realize their dreams and potentials if they continue to rely on the United States values, capitalism and African diaspora and modernity. These Africans must ignore the urge to immigrate to the U.S. in search of the African dreams of America, which in reality, is a deception. They must instead invest in their own country and proffer their own solutions to their own economic and political needs. Over reliant on the U.S. and its capitalist system would only lead these African diaspora population into the lives of disappointments and failures. This also explains why Julius argues that “I was compelled to return home...because I preferred freedom.”³²¹

It is important to understand that while these factors mentioned above contribute to the oppression and marginalization of not only African diaspora population but whites as well in the U.S., we cannot ignore the fact that they are not unique to the United States and many other first world nations. In other words, the alienating, dehumanizing and devastating reality of capitalism and African diaspora and modernity are not unique to America. They are universal. For instance, many African countries, in particular Nigeria, where Cole himself has lived and visited numerous times, is a capitalist economy.

Like in the U.S. where the majority of the population, including white Americans, are marginalized and oppressed by the capitalist system, the majority of the Nigerian population are also dehumanized by the impacts of capitalism and modernism/postmodernism. Like Nigeria, many African countries continue to experience the calamitous consequences of capitalism. Rather than meet the economic needs of their people, these African countries continue to lag behind and are incapable of making significant progress in the development of human and material resources. Commenting, for instance, on the danger of the global market/capitalism and its devastating reality on the people, especially on the African diaspora communities in the U.S. , John Toluhi in his book *Government* argues that

One factor responsible for underdevelopment particularly in the third world may probably be the incorporation of most third world countries into the world capitalist system. This has come by way of international trade with its export and import components. The world capitalist system is made up of the countries of the metropolises dictating both the pace and terms of trade while the underdeveloped countries are at the periphery—the receiving end of unequal trade relations. The extraction of surplus capital for development in Europe and America (the center) from the third world countries also led to the underdevelopment of the latter. The appropriation of the economic surplus came via enslavement, forced labor, low wages, acquisition of mineral right and capital export for the purpose of generating huge profits for the imperialists. At the end of the day, third world countries were left poorer and impoverished.³²²

As the quote above indicates, while post-African diaspora and modernity is an effective tool in the fights against African diaspora and modernity, it has contradictions: It turned oppressive concepts like nationalism and capitalism in its inverted corrupt form.

Julius' experiences with racism and alienation suggests that racial discrimination and the negative impacts of African diaspora and modernity in the U.S. is an ongoing problem. Its persistence nevertheless is devastating for immigrants like Julius. As Sheila argues, African diaspora population like Julius are prevented from realizing their American dreams and “barred

from participating as citizens and equals in their New World context.”³²³ As can be seen in the above analysis; *Open City* is a novel that raises many compelling questions of race relations in the U.S. and represents not only the racial tension that continues to exist between blacks and whites in the country but also the damaging effects of capitalism and African diaspora and modernity.

Julius’ argument such as when he refers to his “disembodied voices and the darkness in his life” represents the always present negativity and the disappointing reality of African diaspora and modernity and the African dreams of America. In the American commodity-based capitalist economy, the wealth is also the poverty. The dreams of participation in American life is also always already the deception of exclusion. They are all simultaneous and mutually constituting and necessary. Those that seek to buy into the dreams are also always already buying the deception that it is. This is why they are culpable as well as oppressed. This is why they seek to come to the U.S. even as they reject it. This is why the U.S. wants them even as it rejects them. This is the paradox of the novel. This explains why Pierre argues that the failure of the American dreams and the calamitous impacts of capitalism “fell on us like plague.”

Like many African diaspora population, Julius immigrates to America in hopes of realizing his American dreams. Unfortunately, his dreams and aspiration continues to elude him primarily because of his experiences with American capitalism, African diaspora and modernity racism and oppression. For example, in New York City, he continues to live his life with “self-pity” in the face of “catalogue of sufferings.”³²⁴ Describing some of the characteristics of New York and Brussels and why these cities are hostile to immigrant communities, Julius argues that

With New York being an open city, but not in an obvious way; and Brussels actually, historically, having been an open city. And both of them being spaces that are porous, in many ways, to invasion. In a sense, my novel is about the ferocity of New York, the way in which it’s open to all kinds of insurgency from

within. This is the sort of close doubling that I was interested in; but fictionally that can be risky. Sometimes readers want it to be a lot clearer—what the contrast is, what the point is. But I wanted to say, well, in life sometimes it's closer than that. And it's that small gap that interests me more.³²⁵

The above phrase that “both of them being spaces that are porous, in many ways, to invasion” suggests, once again, that these two huge megacities are places where immigrants are welcomed, accepted and diversity is celebrated. However, these cities are completely intolerant and crude towards African diaspora population, in particular immigrants from Africa. They are dehumanizing and repressive to marginalized immigrants like Julius and they are emblematic of oppression and abuse by first world capitalism and African diaspora and modernity.

The story of these immigrants epitomize the condition of many African diaspora communities in the U.S. Commenting on the sad and disappointing reality of the American dreams for not only African diaspora population but other immigrants' communities in the U.S., Reuben Abati in his book *Trapped: A Compendium of Issues on Illegal Immigration* argues that

The experiences of these immigrants' characters symbolize the situation of many a foreigner in America, the so called land of opportunity. In other words, he is not alone in his desperate battle for experience and direction; his struggle stands in for the struggle of many. He and many others live on the hope that someday, they will make the American dreams, hit it big and return home heroes of their people. Unfortunately, such aspirations, in many cases, remain what they are: dreams, and dreams that never get realized.³²⁶

As a result of the experiences of the African diaspora communities in the U.S., not only are they transnational characters but their stories are appealing to audience worldwide because they represent the plights of oppressed and marginalized immigrants globally. Their stories also epitomize courage and determination in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Running a Marathon: A Metaphor for Oppression and Alienation:

Julius, like many immigrants to the U.S., does not feel welcomed and the hostility towards him makes him feel like a prisoner in America. As a result of his circumstances, he often feels “alienated and hopeless.” The novel narrator describes a time when Julius had successfully completed a marathon in the City but no one was around to celebrate his accomplishment because “he is black.” Running a marathon is a very difficult and gruesome activity to do, as it takes a lot of courage, steadfastness and commitment.

Considering the excruciating and deadly risks of running a marathon described in the novel, one would have expected Julius to be celebrated for successfully running one. Unfortunately, no one was there when he needed them most because he is black, further underscoring his alienation and hopelessness in New York City. Julius’ experiences with loneliness also explains why Sheila argues in her book *Contact Zones*, that black immigrants like Julius are “persona non grata” in Western societies like the U.S. The alienation that Julius faces, Sheila argues further “creates a dislocation,” creating more poignant conditions and preventing these African diaspora communities from achieving their American dreams. As the above analysis illustrates, like many immigrants to the U.S., Julius’ American dreams and purpose in life are shattered, making him to say “I wish I didn’t have this burden, this burden that is so much like God’s own burden.”

“Walking” As a Metaphor for Alienation and Racism:

Each time Julius thinks about the experiences of racism that he faces living in New York City, “his bodies become pale, and his hearts tireless and he feels like he really does not exist.”³²⁷ His experiences with racial discrimination and alienation also makes him say that “I was alone.”³²⁸ As a means to overcome his distress, Julius often takes an “aimless wandering”³²⁹

around the city listening to immigrants' stories and ruminating over his own circumstances. Julius often takes this long walk through the city as a kind of therapy, a way to overcome his alienation, and most importantly to shake off his experiences with racism. During one of his many walks in the city, for example, Julius realizes something quite unusual at the subway station:

Everyone in the car seemed to be wearing black or dark gray. One woman, unusually tall, more than six feet, wore a black jacket over a long, black, pleated skirt...no one on the train spoke and no one, it seemed, knew anyone else... it was as though we were all listening closely to the rattle of the train on the racks. The light were dim. I knew then that I was no longer heading directly home...at Ninety-Sixth Street, I switched to the 2 express...the man sitting across from me wore a pumpkin-colored jacket, and next to him was a woman in a sky blue ski jacket... a few people in this train talked to each other.³³⁰

The fact that “no one in the train talked to each other” signifies not only the individualistic nature of the New York City, but it highlights the alienation that exists among races there. These separations that Julius describes accentuate the fact that among the New Yorkers, there exists wide gaps and boundaries, which keep whites from blacks, and all races in general.

Much of Julius' experiences with racial discrimination and alienation are conveyed through the lens of these segregation, estrangements and “these walks,” which he further describes as “counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital...taking me farther and farther afield each time....”³³¹ By bringing to light the separations and boundaries that continue to exist among the New Yorkers, *Open City*, opens a new perspective and space that not only challenge the idea of unity and understanding among the New Yorkers population, but it calls to attention to the tensions and obstacles among racial groups and communities in the city by foregrounding the complexities of race relations in the U.S. as a whole. By emphasizing the ‘black’ and ‘dim’ appearances of the New Yorkers, the separations that exist between races, their differences in personalities, such as the people’s fashion styles, their moods, “their not talking to each other in

the subway train,” Cole reinforces the tensions that exists not only between African diaspora communities like Julius and the white people, but also among the races in general.

For Cole, New York City is a microcosm of the U.S. itself, a country where racial intolerance is deeply ingrained. More importantly, the novel’s graphic depiction of New Yorkers individualistic life styles and their complete silence as they travel in the train raises questions of unfriendliness, racism and stereotypes in maintaining such disconnections. Thus, on one level, the train and silence in the train become associated with what Petty Sheila describes as the “surging of time,”³³² symbolizing the fragmented nature of racial harmonies in the City. Julius’ statement that their journey “was as though we were all listening closely to the rattle of the train on the tracks” is a metaphor for the uneasiness and the turbulence that continue to exists between races in the city, symbolizing the subtle alienation and intolerance created by racism.

Cole’s Intervention:

Cole’s intervention, therefore, is that rather than immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams—which is illusive— African diaspora communities must stay back home and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of their native countries. This also explains why Julius argues that “I was compelled to return home.” By return home, Julius is referring to his native country in Nigeria. Cole’s message is not only a message about immigrant’s fiction’s indictment of white American African diaspora and modernity and various forms of modernity but it is also a message about the rejection of American values and tradition. This suggests that only by returning to their ancestral homelands can these African diaspora communities in the U.S. be empowered and freed from the shackles of oppression and racism.

Cole believes that it is through embracing their African traditions and homelands, rejecting the American capitalist system, self-empowerment, self-reliance and the realization of their own original African principles and policies can these African diaspora communities experience self-fulfillment and reach their potentials. Cole also believes that African diaspora communities in the U.S. have been devastated, devalued and dehumanized for far too long by African diaspora and modernity oppression and by the American capitalist system. Cole's African diaspora and modernity intervention is that these Africans must reject and denounce these first world values if they must progress. This suggests that only by returning to their ancestral homelands can these African diaspora communities be empowered and freed from the shackles of oppression, racism and modernity.

In the novel, Cole also seems to suggest that like the oppressed and marginalized African diaspora communities in the U.S., the “American Dreams” is a delusional discourse to begin with for other racial groups as well, including white Americans. In other words, not only is capitalism exploitative and dehumanizing but the American dreams is unrealistic in the first place. It is often simply the dreams of capitalism and that dreams is also a deception. The dreams of wealth is also the simultaneous dreams of alienated labor and poverty. It satisfies nobody in a whole way (including white Americans and even the affluent). It is both foisted on those that buy it. It also satisfies some sort of preexisting need for them. They are both fooled by it and buy into it because that delusion satisfies some problematic desire within them. Just take care of your use of it and do so in a manner that always evokes its problems.

Other issues Cole focuses on in the novel include the devastating impacts of African diaspora and modernity and capitalism on the immigrants’ characters portrayed in the novel, the decadence, sickness and the collapse of the American civilization and values, and the negative

reality of modernity and oppression not only on the African diaspora communities in the U.S but also other groups, including white Americans. In other words, not only is the novel an indictment of modernism and capitalism but the decadence and sickness of the American society in general. This explains why Julius, the novel protagonist, argues that the American society is surrounded by “eccentricity or madness; we are no longer at all habituated to our own voices.” Also, through his consistent allusion to both New York and Brussels (two cities that are symbolic of global African diaspora and modernity and capitalism) Cole seems to be suggesting that even in these wealthy nations, society is broken and fragmented and the breaks affect the white people themselves.

To put it another way, Cole himself seems to have a critique of both New York/Brussels racist structure. He also seems to have a critique of a broken first world society in general. Cole’s descriptions of New York/Brussels seem to be a critique of capitalism and African diaspora and modernity. That society weighs especially heavy on African diaspora communities in the U.S. but it is broken for Whites as well. Like the marginalized and oppressed African diaspora communities in these two massive cities, the whites themselves are not whole people. They too are alienated and fragmented by African diaspora and modernity/ capitalism. That is, the American dream is a deception. It is a false promise to its core. Even the whites living in the upper west side of Manhattan and in parts of the country are broken.

Teju Cole, writer, art historian, photographer, and photography critic of *The New York Times Magazine*, is the author of the novella *Every Day is for the Thief*, named a book *The New York Times*. Cole has contributed to *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Financial Times*, *Aperture*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta* and several other publications. His photography has been exhibited in India and the US, published in a number of journals, and will be the subject of a solo

exhibition in Italy as well. Born in the U.S. in 1975 to Nigerian parents, and raised in Nigeria, Cole currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. A recipient of the PEN/Hemingway Award and 2015 Windham Campbell Prize for fiction, Teju Cole is the Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College. Of his novel *Open City*, *Time Magazine* said, “a powerful and unnerving inquiry into the human soul. Cole has earned flattering comparisons to literary heavyweights like J.M. Coetzee, W.G. Sebald and Henry James, but *Open City* merits higher praise: it’s a profoundly original work, intellectually stimulating and possessing of a style both engaging and seductive”³³³

Open City has reached a broad global audience in the four years since its publication. It has been translated into ten languages and has received positive reviews from major American newspapers and literary critics worldwide. The text was named one of the best books written in 2012 by *The Atlantic*, *The Economist*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe* and many others. Miguel Syjuco of *The New York Times* states that “with every anecdote, with each overlap, Cole lucidly builds a compassionate and masterly work engaged more with questions than with answers regarding some of the biggest issues of our time: migration, moral accountability and our tenuous tolerance of one another’s differences.”³³⁴ Not only does Syjuco’s argument underscore the novel’s significance and ability to engage compelling and consequential issues but it complicates and challenges us to rethink our attitudes about immigration, African diaspora and modernity, alienation and race in America. The universal appeal of the novel is not only emblematic of Cole’s writing prowess but it is indicative of his ability to engage and complicate compelling and significant issues.

The positive reviews and broad acceptance of the novel underscores its seemingly universal and transnational appeal. Even though the novel focuses on the theme of African

migration and the experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S., the issues raised are compelling and speak to the global audience. For example, the novel raises fascinating and intriguing questions not only about immigration but also concerning oppression, capitalism, systemic racial order, the calamitous consequences of modernism, inequality and injustices, alienation and many more that are not exclusive to the United States. Cole's writings take root not only in the social, cultural and political realities of the African continent but also in the contemporary discourse on immigration. Born in the state of Michigan, United States, Cole is one of the new generation of African writers writing on immigration, race and class in the U.S. Cole and his parents returned to Lagos, Nigeria, shortly after his birth in Michigan. At the age of seventeen, he returned to the U.S. to attend Kalamazoo College, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1996. Cole's next return to America occurred after the September 11th, 2011 terrorist attacks against the country.

This devastating terrorist attack greatly shaped and influenced Cole writings. Furthermore, like many post 9/11 immigrants, Cole faced a lot of discrimination and unwarranted investigations at several Airports and Embassies he went through primarily because of his racial and ethnic backgrounds.³³⁵ For example, in 2012, Cole went on a blog titled the "White-Savior Industrial Complex" in order to express his frustrations with what he saw as racism and oppression perpetrated by white Americans not only against himself but also against oppressed groups worldwide. According to Cole,

the fastest growth industry in the U.S. is the White savior Industrial Complex. The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, funds charities in the afternoon, and receives award in the evening. The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm. This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people. The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege. Feverish worry over that awful African warlord. But close to 1.5

million Iraqis died from an American war of choice. I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.³³⁶

The above quote demonstrates that Cole himself has been a victim a racism and unjustifiable treatment, and what he sees as “white oppression.” Through his argument above, Cole is not only questioning racism towards marginalized and oppressed immigrants like himself, but he is also challenging white hegemony, institutional racism and the structures of power, thereby indicting American racist and oppressive attitudes already embedded in slavery, Jim Crow Era, African diaspora and modernity and imperialism.³³⁷

Cole’s experiences with racism and American hegemony as illustrated in the above quote shape many of his writings, including *Open City* (2012) and *Every day is for the Thief* (2007). Like Julius, his protagonist in *Open City*, Cole lives in a society where he feels like he is being constantly monitored by powerful forces, forces so powerful and so repressive Cole feels dehumanized and in the words of Petty Sheila, he feels “physiologically alienated.”³³⁸ Cole, like his protagonist, Julius, feels trapped and lonely, leading him (Julius) to once again express his frustrations with living like a second class citizen in the U.S.: “I must say, I’m ready to go into the forest. I’m ready to go in. It is time to enter the forest and lie down, and let the lions come for me... and I’m in such terrible pain just now.” Commenting further about his frustrations living in New York, Julius argues that “there are actually lots of insane people in this town, maybe the majority of New Yorkers. Well, no, he went on, I don’t mean that. But, really, everyone just finds a way to cope, no one is completely free from mental problems, so I say let everyone sort themselves out.”³³⁹ Julius’ circumstances as illustrated in the above quotes accentuate his frustration living in the city.

Fredric Jameson, Cole, *Open City*, Capitalism and African diaspora and modernity:

Ultimately, Cole seeks to expose not only the racial gaps that continue to exist among groups in America but he also wants to unmask the devastating and broken reality of the American dreams, the fragmentation of the American capitalist system and what Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Capitalism* calls “pastiche.” In his book, Jameson argues that African diaspora and modernity are detrimental and cause many people like the characters portrayed in *Open City* to experience physical, economic and cultural displacement and alienation, resulting in feelings of hopelessness and fragmentation.³⁴⁰ Like Cole in *Open City*, Jameson is very critical of modernism/postmodernism America, the hopelessness, the fragmentation of capitalism and its devastating consequences brought upon the oppressed and marginalized individuals in our postmodern society, including white Americans.

In his book, Jameson uses the dominance, the complete control and the significant space occupied by the Los Angeles Bonaventure hotel as a metaphor and an allegory for the takeover, the total control and marginalization of the U.S. capitalist system over the majority of the population. It is a system that refuses the American people, including white Americans, human dignity and respect. These oppressed and marginalized individuals are alienated by modernity and marginalized. They are on the brink of the economic abyss of the American society and as such are deprived of equality, their freedom and the American dreams. Jameson’s description of the emptiness and alienation of cities like New York and Brussels exemplify the condition of these immigrants’ characters like Julius. Commenting, for instance, on the alienation and hopelessness that Julius feels not being celebrated despite finishing this exasperating activity, the novel narrator explains:

We walked in silence for a while, not intentionally walking together but finding ourselves moving at the same pace in the same direction. Eventually, I asked

whether he had just finished a race and, when he nodded and smiled. But I began to think after twenty-six miles and 385 yards, he had simply collected his bag, and walking home. There was no friend or family present to celebrate his achievement. I pitied him, then...I bid him goodbye and began myself to walk faster. I imagined his limping form receding as I pressed ahead, his wiry face bearing a victory apparent to none but himself.³⁴¹

The quote above illustrates the alienation that Julius faces as he struggles to assimilate into the U.S. Moreover, as suggested in this quote, like many African diaspora communities, Julius is a victim of American modernity and rejection. The fact that no one celebrates Julius' achievements demonstrates his rejection and loneliness, which is also a serious indictment of American society's individualism and racism.

Because of the hopelessness he experiences living in New York City, Julius also feels as though he lives in a "wasteland," a metaphor for the alienation he is subjected to in America. It is this same alienating and hopeless environment Jameson describes in his book. As the above analysis demonstrates, Julius feels like a second class citizen and ostracized in America. Due to racism, hopelessness and alienation, Cole like his protagonist, would take long walks through New York meditating about life, culture, society, his family and friends as a means to find some happiness, meaning and purpose in life. Cole, like Julius, seems to be embarking on their walks through the city not only as a means to finding themselves but also as a means to empowering themselves in the midst of hopelessness.

It is also important to realize that Cole came to writing primarily because of his experiences with alienation and hopelessness in the U.S. For example, commenting on the factors that motivated him to write *Open City*, Cole, in an interview with Anderson Tepper, states that the novel

Wasn't just the story of immigrants that I wanted to tell, which is an important part of the book. But in some way, I'm concerned with the story of the

disregarded, a category that immigrants overlap extensively with—the disregarded in the sense of the ignored, the invisible, but also in the sense of people whose sexuality might not be mainstream: somebody who’s gay, or female, or especially old, for example...so I wanted to tell their stories.³⁴²

The capitalist economy in which these immigrants find themselves is a system based on repression, silence and injustices. It is a system rigged against the powerless and vulnerable people like the African diaspora communities in the U.S. portrayed in the novel. In fact, the title of the novel (*Open City*) suggests that New York and Brussels are two modern cities where people from all walks of life (regardless of race, class, religion, gender) would be welcomed, appreciated and accepted. Sadly, this is not the case with African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius. Rather than being welcomed, he is rejected and discriminated against because he is black, making Julius to describe Brussels and New York as hostile places where “we walked in silence.”³⁴³

African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius are not the only victims of this systemic injustice and the exploitative capitalist power, economy and institutions. Other racial groups, including white Americans, are also entrapped in this deception. It is a system shaped and dominated by greed, selfishness and corruption. In such systems, it is impossible for many individuals, in particular, the African diaspora communities in the U.S. to thrive and achieve the American dreams. Jameson’s argument demonstrates the fact that post/African diaspora and modernity has completely defined and transformed societal originality and our historical past into states of emptiness and fragmentation. Using several examples such as the Los Angeles Westin Bonaventure hotel, Jameson underscores the dehumanization and commodification of human lives in capitalist economies such as those of the United States and Brussels portrayed in *Open City*. Jameson posits that postmodern architectures like the Los Angeles Westin

Bonaventure hotel has become symbols of oppression, fragmentation and what he terms “pastiche.”

Rather than epitomizing humanity, these architectures have epitomized dominance, control and oppression. They have become a total space and rather than blend into the society, they have replaced and become the society. Their presence represents not only oppression but also the commodification of human lives. Rather than adjust to the society, postmodern architectures such as this become the society. Not only do they devalue human life but they shape and control human life. They turn human beings into commodities, exemplifying the global market and capitalist economy Cole is alluding to in the novel. Post/modernism Jameson argues further has become a cultural dominant such that human life in capitalist economies like those of the United States and Brussels are defined and dictated by consumerism. In other words, rather than being whole and normal, human lives in postmodern economies such as the U.S. and Brussels have become commodities to be exploited and abused. The end result is that post/modernism/capitalism win over decency and sanity, creating commodification of human lives, hence, Jameson’s “cultural logic of late capitalism. Jameson calls this condition “pastiche.”

Jameson points out the differences between postmodern and modern conditions, insisting that while modernism enunciate “some residue zones of ‘nature’ or ‘being’ of the old, the older, the archaic and still accept that humans can “do something to that nature and work at transforming that ‘referent,’ post/modernism has resulted in the commodification in human condition such that “an immense dilation of culture’s sphere (the sphere of commodities and capitalism) an immense and historically original acculturation of the real.”³⁴⁴ Whereas “modernism was still minimally and tangentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to

make it transcend itself,” postmodernism ‘is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process.’³⁴⁵

The end result of this is that our societies are completely overtaken and endangered by capitalist thinking over everything else. Like New York and Brussels described in *Open City*, Jameson in his book is arguing that our postmodern society (capitalist and commodity-based society) is shaped and influenced by “high culture” over “popular culture,” depthlessness and fragmentation over originality and sanity. He posits that natural order and normalcy are completely violated and transformed in postmodern/capitalist economies. The result is the dominance and complete takeover of consumer culture (capitalism), which had threatened and continues to threaten the oppressed and marginalized individuals like the characters depicted in Cole’s *Open City*.

The fact that Julius is rejected and marginalized in these cities also suggests that they are places rife with racial prejudices against immigrants. They are cities replete with systemic racism and hegemonic power structures designed to undermine Julius’ humanity and subvert his existence. For instance, the rejection and alienation that Julius experiences in New York City makes him argue that he “experiences life as a continuity, and only after it falls away, after it becomes the past, do we see its discontinuities. The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float.”³⁴⁶

A victim of racial discrimination and stereotypes in New York City as evident by the above analysis, Julius continues to reflect, observe and speak out about the impacts of institutional racism on African diaspora communities in the U.S. like himself. He continues to think about how stereotypes of this immigrant’s community have eaten deep into the fabric of the U.S. society as a way of throwing more light onto this problem. For example, another

compelling evidence of racism Julius experiences in the novel happens when he is assaulted and badly injured by some white teenagers during one his many long walks around New York City, without any provocations whatsoever simply because he is black. Commenting on his assaults by these teenagers, Julius says that “I was stunned into momentary confusion, as if I had just been told something that wasn’t possible.”³⁴⁷ He also describes this incident saying that “it could have been worse...and pain came streaming in physical as if the ambient temperature had suddenly risen and a dry heat was spreading to all parts of my body.”³⁴⁸

Remarking further on his predicaments living in New York, the novel narrator argues that “in that moment, as he contemplates these ideas, he suddenly felt sorrowful. His recent encounter with the bedbugs troubled him more than what he had suffered in other ways: racism, homophobia, the incessant bereavement that was one of the hidden costs of a long life. The bedbugs trumped them all.”³⁴⁹ Hence, the assaults against Julius by these white teenagers, together with his bedbugs’ incident, functions as a metaphor for Julius’ alienation and entrapment in a racist and unjust American society.

These agonizing experiences, which make Julius feel “defeated by unforeseen changes” underscores the destructive impacts of racism in America, and it is Cole’s way of drawing attention to the detrimental impacts of African diaspora and modernity in the country. Repeatedly confronted by African diaspora and modernity in the country, which usually makes him feel subhuman and inferior, Julius, according to Jacqueline Doyle in her essay *Developing Negatives* speaks out against racial discrimination he is constantly subjected to because he “seeks a way to assert his own experience and ground his own shifting experience—as an emigrant from a country still suffering the ravages of slavery and African diaspora and modernity, as an

emigrant to a country complicit in that history and its power relations, and, as a newly independent, self-possessed, invented self-in-progress.”³⁵⁰

Two Mega Cities: Symbols of Racism and Alienations.

Taken in contexts of other prominent novels written by Anglophone African diaspora communities in the U.S. writers, including Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizens* (1983), Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* (2012), and Taiye Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go* (2013), it could be said that Cole is “foremost iconoclast who debunks, not only the myth of American imperial power and benevolence, but he also exposes the U.S. societies and people, in particular white Americans, as racist, oppressive and intolerant.”³⁵¹ Furthermore, through the novel, Cole seeks to shed light into global and transnational nature of racism and oppression. That is, he demonstrates that racism and oppression are not unique nor limited to the U.S., showing that it is ubiquitous. Commenting, for example, on the transnational nature of the novel and its relevance to black experiences worldwide, Sheila describes the book as seeking “to uncover the specificities of black experience in the face of complex flows of history and culture across African diaspora and modernity realities.”³⁵²

Throughout *Open City*, there is constant reference to New York and Brussels, two of the world’s megacities, and places where one would think African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Julius would be welcomed and treated decently. As two world megacities populated by people from all walks of life, one would think that that Julius would easily be accepted and treated decently. Sadly, the opposite is the case. Rather than being received with open arms and treated like a human being, Julius is subjected to miseries and what he calls “alienation,” resulting in “signs of distress in his tear-filled eyes.”³⁵³ Frustrated by his experiences with

rejection and alienation and the fact that he is constantly being dehumanized in Brussels and New York simply because he is black, Julius exposes what he sees as the racial discrimination and oppression taking place in those cities, and the excruciating reality for African diaspora communities like himself. As an illustration, while living in Brussels, Julius talks about how “five skinheads put a black French man in a coma.” Commenting further on his experiences with racial discrimination in those cities, Julius argues that “I get looks that make me feel like Ota Benga, the Mbuti man who was put on display in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906.”³⁵⁴

The fact that Julius experiences the racism and oppression not only demonstrate that he is not wanted in Brussels and New York but it accentuates the inescapable realities of institutional racism and the pervasive nature of white power apparatus in these cities. Furthermore, the above quotes foreground the humiliating and distressing consequences of racial discrimination in cities like Brussels and New York, indicting the images of these megacities, and creating tensions that challenges readers to questions their treatments of not only African diaspora communities but immigrants as a whole. Describing his loneliness and rejection he feels further, Julius argues that his “dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger—made me a target for the inchoate rage...I could, in the wrong place, be taken for a rapist.” As a result of these obstacles, Julius often “walked in silence” while thinking about the ‘endless variety of difficulties’³⁵⁵ he endures. Hence, Julius predicaments as illustrated in the above quotes bring to light the various ways in which African diaspora communities are subjected to racism and oppression, signifying the different manners in which modernity, oppression and institutional racism work in the American society.

As the analysis above illustrates, part of Cole’s mission in the novel is to show that racism and modernity are devastating, condescending and dehumanizing conditions; they

negatively impact this immigrants' community in the U.S., preventing them from reaching their potential and achieving their American dreams. For example, commenting on the painful reality of racism and modernity for African diaspora communities in the U.S. in America, Tim Wise, an American civil rights activist, in his documentary *White Like Me: Race, Racism and White Privilege in America* argues that

The fact is, racial inequalities still exist and racial bias still affects the way that we view others. So many of the old forms of discrimination that we supposedly left behind in the old Jim Crow era are suddenly legal again once you've been branded a felon. That's why I say we haven't ended racial caste in America, we've just redesigned it. It might be difficult to admit, but it's certainly not difficult to understand how this kind of racialized justice system ends up benefiting white people...Congratulating ourselves on how post racial and color-blind we are does nothing to change these facts, and in many ways makes things worse.³⁵⁶

In addition to exploring the ways these immigrants' communities are victimized by African diaspora and modernity and modernity, the institutions and systems that generated and maintain these conditions, the chapter examines how these immigrants themselves are rejecting their disparaging and negative images. Ultimately, the chapter explores the ways in which the novel offers insights into not only the impacts of African diaspora and modernity and modernity on the African diaspora communities in the U.S. but also the ways in which these immigrants are able to overcome their oppression and turn circumstances into positive and inspiring stories.

As the stories of these African diaspora communities in the U.S. unravel, we are confronted with the reality of being immigrants in a hostile and racist America. For instance, instead of being treated humanely in America, these African diaspora communities are marginalized and subjected to various forms of oppressions and inequalities primarily because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Julius, for instance, is constantly called "a nigger and a gangbanger" by some white Americans he encounters. Because of his experiences with African

diaspora and modernity in the U.S., Julius even argues that ‘I became very tired; tired unto death was the phrase that scrolled across my mind.’”

Again, rather than achieve the American dreams, these immigrants experience the American deception: they are racially oppressed and marginalized. Commenting further on the devastating reality of African diaspora and modernity and modernity for blacks in general in America, Wise posits that

Today there are more African Americans in prison or jail, on probation or parole, than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. And racial bias still affects the way we view others. And when we fail to recognize this, we not only continue to do an injustice to people of color, we end up doing damage to white folks as well. Americans have a long history of wanting to believe that everything is fine when it comes to race in America, and that it’s time to move on to other things.³⁵⁷

However, despite all these negative experiences, these African diaspora communities in the U.S.characters remain resolute in their determination to succeed and most importantly liberate themselves from shackles of oppression.

Therefore, using the stories and experiences of these immigrants, Cole debunks the notion that the U.S. is a ‘promise land’ and a country devoid of injustices, oppressions and inequalities. The African diaspora and modernity of these immigrants explains why Abati argues that

There are fearful indications that young fleeing Africans targeting a better life in developed countries may actually be chewing more than they bargain for. In some cases, the reputation which has preceded them are such that the black young African may have a very unfriendly environment awaiting him or her in so-called developed places where young black people (immigrants) are synonymous with crime, drug trafficking and prostitution... the battle rages on, on all sides, and all the parties unrelenting and adamant. The youths won’t give up on illegal migration, foreign immigration laws are getting more drastic, and African governments have not taken up challenges of developing their countries.³⁵⁸

Through these immigrants' stories and experiences, Cole establishes the fact that the American dream is not as achievable as many African diaspora communities think it is. This explains why Julius argues in the novel that "I was a disappointment in this regard."

The underlying lesson demonstrated by the gloomy experiences of these immigrants in the U.S. is that they refuse to remain victims. Rather than complain and be angry about their negative circumstances, these immigrants remain courageous, diligent and determined, turning their stories around for the better and refusing to be defined by their appalling conditions. Julius, for example, emigrates to the U.S. from Nigeria in order to reach his potential and achieve the American dream. In America, he is not welcomed and treated humanely. Instead, he is disparaged, alienated, marginalized and racially oppressed by the white Americans he encounters. He is even called a "nigger" and a "gang member" by many white Americans just because Julius is black. According to Julius, the oppression of blacks in America is so grave that even in death, their bodies are still being abused and violated. Talking about this, Julius argues

The civil powers recognized the justness of the cause and, in 1789, the New York Anatomy Act was passed. From that time forward, as was done in Europe, the needs of surgical anatomy were to be met by the cadavers of executed murderers, arsonists, and burglars. The Act added, to the sentence of death for criminals, the further retribution of the medical profession; and it left the buried bodies of innocent blacks in peace and neglect. How difficult it was, from the point of view of the twenty-first century, to fully believe that these people, with the difficult lives they were forced to live, were truly people, complex in all their dimensions as we are, fond of pleasures, shy of suffering, attached to their families... And yet, the Negro Burial Ground was no mass grave: each body had been bared singly, according to whichever rite it was that, outside the city walls, the blacks had been at liberty to practice."³⁵⁹

As African diaspora communities in the US, the white American society expects Julius and many of the characters in the novel to fail and be miserable, making Julius to argue that what he feels living among white Americans "was stronger than hate."³⁶⁰ However, in defiance of their

appalling circumstances, Julius, like many of the characters, work hard, making sure they are not defined by racism and oppression. In fact, Julius attends an American Ivy League College in New York City and subsequently becomes a psychiatric doctor, helping the impoverished, the oppressed and marginalized members of the society.

The racial backgrounds of these immigrants' characters suggest why they are being marginalized and subjected into second class citizens in America. Commenting, for instance, on the condescending, dehumanizing and oppressive manners African diaspora communities are treated in America, Sheila Petty in her book *Contact Zones*, argues that African diaspora communities in the U.S. are "denigrated by American social institutions and face barriers created by racist stereotypes. Rejected by corrupt, African diaspora and modernity Africa and driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrants suffer psychological alienation that eventually leads him to the revelation that, if he wants equality, he will have to fight for it."³⁶¹ Sheila's argument reflects the devastating and disparaging reality of racial injustices and oppression on the African diaspora communities in America and reflects the inhumanity and cruelty that has been used to both marginalize these immigrants and to sustain control over them.

As the experiences of these characters indicate, racism is a devastating and painful condition and it manifests in the manner these characters are demeaned and disparaged in the U.S. Racism dehumanizes the victims and makes them feel inconsequential and inferior. In their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, for instance, Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that the concept of race arose from the European encounter with New World and Sub-Saharan "otherness." They argue that "race is pre-eminently a sociohistorical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations

and historical context in which they are embedded. Racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between societies.”³⁶² Elaborating further on the concepts of race and racism, they argue that

In the United States, the black/white color line has historically been rigidly defined and enforced. White is seen as a ‘pure’ category. Any racial intermixture makes the “nonwhite.” We use the term racial formation to refer to the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped into racial meanings...there is a continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective...and there is also an opposite temptation: to see it as mere deception, which an ideal social order would eliminate.³⁶³

As the quote above demonstrates, race is a social construction, meaning it is a fluid concept, reflecting social rather than physical characteristics. The above quote suggests that the meaning of race is subjective and not objective, reflecting the meaning we as a society assign to it. The above definition clearly shows some of the ways in which racism can serve to dehumanize human beings, in particular people of color, preventing them from achieving their American dreams and purpose in life. Commenting, for instance, on the causes and destructive impacts of racism, John Hodge contends that “racism is the belief that there are superior and inferior “races” of human based on the transmission of organic, genetic, and talent-related differences.”

As portrayed in the novel, a noticeable number of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S. are marginalized, silenced, alienated and tend to have no say in their lives. They are dehumanized by modernity and oppression, making them unable to make decisions that would make them progress in life and achieve their American dreams. Like machines, these African diaspora communities in the U.S. are used, abused and manipulated by white Americans. The experiences of Julius, Saidu and many other African diaspora communities in the U.S.’ characters with African diaspora and modernity and abuse at the hands of white

security officials during their incarceration emphasize this. Additionally, Julius' statement and frustrations about being alienated and marginalized among white Americans because he is black illuminates this point. Commenting further on the frustration and estrangements he feels living among white Americans, Julius states that "I proceeded among whites, entering their quieter street life, feeling for a minute that I was the only person walking around a depopulated world, and reassured only by occasional signs of life."³⁶⁴

A great many African diaspora communities portrayed in the novel suffer the burden of their race and ethnicity in the U.S. To illustrate, Julius, Saidu and many other African diaspora communities in the U.S.' characters are victims of their race and ethnicity. As the novel indicates, the negative experience that these characters' face in America are very much generated and maintained by the historically ingrained nature of a racial discrimination and modernity in America.

The oppression of these African diaspora communities in the U.S. are sustained by the racist, inhuman and unjust aspects of American tradition and the status quo in which people of color, in particular black people, are seen as inferior to whites and therefore marginalized, oppressed and treated as second class citizens. Not just African diaspora communities but many immigrants' communities, including white Americans, continue to face the devastating reality and disappointing reality of the American dreams. One of the primary reason these immigrants continue to face racial discrimination and systemic oppression in the U.S. is because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. To illustrate, Julius, the protagonist of the novel, argues that he is systemically marginalized in the U.S. because of a "racist American" society.

I should note that there are some major differences between chapter five and chapter four. One of the major differences between chapter four and five is that chapter five emphasizes how

the African diaspora communities in the U.S.’ communities in the U.S. portrayed in the novel are able to empower themselves in the face of oppression, racial discrimination and modernity.

Chapter five accentuates the place of self-fulfillment and self-empowerment in the formation of African diaspora communities experience in America. Another important difference between the two chapters is that while chapter five focuses exclusively on the oppression and racial aspects of the novel, chapter four goes a little further by emphasizing the notion that African diaspora communities themselves are the culprits in their own failures in the U.S.

In other words, it demonstrates that African diaspora communities in the U.S. are responsible for the circumstances they face in America as portrayed in the novel. While it is appropriate to blame white oppression and racism for the negative experiences of African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S., these African diaspora communities in the U.S. also have themselves to blame for buying into the American dreams and for not standing up for themselves and their countries. To clarify, many of these immigrants believe that the U.S. is a ‘promise land,’ a place where their American dreams can become a reality. Ironically, the U.S. turns out to be a complete disappointment and deception to them.

Rather than stay in their home countries and contribute significantly to their growth and development, these African diaspora communities decide to immigrate to the U.S. in search of the American dreams. The American dreams that these immigrants tend to seek turn into a deception. In other words, rather than achieve their American dreams and realize their potentials, these African diaspora communities in the U.S. are subjected to African diaspora and modernity and modernity. They become villains instead of heroes and the oppressed instead of achievers. They are marginalized, oppressed and become victims of racial discrimination.

Despite their experiences with racism and oppression in America, the African diaspora communities in the U.S. community remain strong, courageous, and refuse to let themselves be undermined by racial injustices. As shown in my analysis of the novel below, African diaspora communities are subjected to racial discrimination and modernity in America, yet they refuse to allow these conditions to define, or undermine them. Many of the characters in the novel, in particular Julius, the novel protagonist, are representative of the courage, strength and resilience of this immigrants' community as they struggle to establish themselves in America. The African populations are emblematic of the different paths to African diaspora communities' experience, experience and power within the mainstream American society.

As indicated earlier, Julius is not the only character in the novel who is disparaged and oppressed as a result of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. This chapter introduces us to many other characters in the novel who are also oppressed and marginalized in the U.S. In particular, this chapter introduces us to Saidu, an African diaspora population, who illegally immigrates to the U.S. as a means to achieve the American dreams. Sadly, for these characters, the U.S. turns out not to be a promise land. These immigrants' American dreams turn to a deception. They are marginalized and dehumanized not only because they immigrate to the U.S. illegally but also because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Saidu's agonizing experience at the hands of the U.S. immigration agents in the prison where he has been incarcerated underscores Cole's anger and frustration with the pervasive nature of racial discrimination and modernity against African diaspora populations in America. Not only are the experiences of Saidu and many other characters in the novel representative of the oppression and injustices that many diaspora communities face but they epitomize the

endurance, courage and these characters' ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the U.S.

Like Julius, Saidu and many other characters in the novel are surrounded by hardships, injustices and systemic oppression. While these characters greatly suffered and face so much agony at the hands of the U.S. immigration officials, dehumanized and treated like second class citizens, they withstand their oppression and adversity and became symbols for a courageous, strong, undivided, and resilient African diaspora communities in America, using their anguish and predicaments as a means to not only empower themselves and move forward but also to promote the interests of the African diaspora in the country.

In America, characters like Julius and Saidu are not welcomed in America because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Not only are they not welcomed but they are also exploited, marginalized and treated like second class citizens. For example, Saidu, who is originally from Liberia in West Africa, does not feel welcomed and appreciated as an immigrant in the U.S. because he is black. Instead, of being treated decently and humanely, Saidu is imprisoned for entering the U.S illegally. Commenting, for instance, on his own distressing conditions in prison, Saidu argues: "but I am tired of it, I want to be released. I have been here more than two years. Twenty-six months. They have just finished my case, and we made an appeal, but it was rejected. Now they are sending me back, but there is no date, just this waiting and waiting."³⁶⁵ As a result of his negative experiences, Saidu sees himself not as a member (a citizen) of the U.S., but as a subaltern and an "outsider." That is, like many other African diaspora communities, he is not welcomed.

Saidu, like many immigrants, come to the U.S. with the hopes of achieving the American dreams. Saidu loves America and wants to contribute positively toward the country.

Unfortunately, America rejects and marginalizes him despite his love for the country. For example, commenting on Saidu's hopes, aspirations and positive feeling toward the U.S., the novel narrator argues that "America had sat solidly in his dreams, had been the absolute focus of his dreams, and when the war began and everything started to crumble, he was sure the Americans would come in and solve the whole thing. But it hadn't been like that; the Americans had been reluctant to help, for their own reasons."³⁶⁶ This quote once more signifies that despite Saidu's love for the country, his willingness to assimilate and contribute significantly to the U.S., he is not appreciated and welcomed despite his love for the country.

Despite Saidu's tragedies and the heartbreaking family catastrophes he experienced growing up in his native country in Liberia, the U.S. immigration agents reject and do not have compassion on him. Rather than treat him with empathy, they put him in jail simply for entering the country illegally. For example, discussing Saidu's agonizing conditions growing up in Liberia, the novel narrator argues that

His school, near the Old Ducor Hotel, had been shelled, and burned to the ground in 1994. A year later, his sister had died of diabetes, an illness that wouldn't have killed her in peacetime. His father, gone since 1985, remained gone, and his mother, a petty trader at the market, had nothing to trade. Saidu had slipped through the shadows of the war. He was pressed many times into fetching water for the NPFL (The National Patriotic Front of Liberia), or cleaning brush, or moving bodies away from the street... His mother and her sister were shot in the second war, by Charles Taylor's men."³⁶⁷

The above quote, once again, underscores Saidu's poignant and miserable condition in his homeland in Liberia. By rejecting Saidu, despite his woes and tragedies, the U.S. is essentially saying he deserves no humanity nor benevolence because he is black. This once more underscores the pervasive nature of injustices not only in the U.S. justice system, but also in the country as a whole.

Explaining the pathetic circumstances of characters like Julius and the injustices that confront them as they struggle to assimilate into the U.S., Sheila posits that they are “driven to despair in a space between clashing cultures, the black migrant suffers psychological alienation.”³⁶⁸ Thus, through Julius and Saidu’s stories, not only is Cole uncovering the oppressions and modernity that have overwhelmed the U.S. immigration system, but he is also calling attention to the inequality and prejudice that have characterized the country, making the U.S. a place where justice is not accessible to the ordinary people.

Many characters in the novel have experienced many problems at the hands of various U.S. law enforcement agents primarily because they are black. For example, commenting on his horrible immigration experiences at the hands of the U.S. immigration and Custom officials because he entered the country illegally, Saidu recalls:

They brought me here, he said, and that was the end. I have been here ever since. I have been outside three times, on the days when I went to court. The lawyers they assigned to me said I might have had a chance before 9/11. But it is okay, I am okay. The food here is bad, it has no taste, but there is a lot of it. One thing I miss is the taste of groundnut stew. You know it? The other inmates are all right, they are good people. The guard are sometimes harsh. Sometimes harsh. You can do nothing about it. I don’t want to go back anywhere, he said. I want to stay in this country. I want to be in America and work. I applied for the asylum, but it wasn’t given. Now they will return me to the port of entry, which is Lisbon. When I got up to leave, he remained seated, and said, come back and visit me, if I am not deported.³⁶⁹

By illustrating Saidu’s harsh and unjust immigration experiences, Cole not only calls into question the U.S. immigration system but he is also pointing out the abusive and exploitative ways in which African diaspora communities in the U.S. like Saidu are handled by the U.S. immigration agents. Moreover, through Saidu’s story, we see the pervasive nature of corruption and exploitation in the U.S. immigration system. By illustrating this story, Cole has

uncovered how corruption and abuse have eaten deep into the fabric of not only the U.S. Custom and immigration system but into the U.S. institutions as a whole.

The draconian behaviors by the various U.S. law enforcement agents toward black immigrants like Julius and Saidu signify the ingrained nature of modernity in establishing the environments in which people considered as “others” are eliminated from the promise of the American Dreams. James Trulow Adams, an American writer and Historian, in 1931 described the American dreams when she posited that “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social or circumstances of birth.”³⁷⁰ Sadly, Julius and many of the characters in the novel are deprived of the American dreams because they are black, suggesting once more that the promise of America is available not for all but for the powerful few.

As a result of his experiences with racism at the hands of various draconian law enforcement agents, who are representatives of the authoritarian and oppressive U.S. power, the African diaspora communities are physically, emotionally and psychologically damaged. This is because rather than being welcomed with open arms, they are treated as the subalterns, the “outsiders.” Another compelling evidence of this occurs when Julius finds himself in the midst of some white people at a party in New York City. Commenting on the racist nature of this event and its pernicious impacts on him, Julius argues that the

Only thing odd, to some of them, is seeing me, young and black, in my seat or at the concession stand. At times, standing in line for the bathroom during intermission, I get looks that make me feel like Ota Benga, the Mbuti man who was put on display in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906. I weary of such thoughts, but I am habituated to them.³⁷¹

By drawing attention to Julius’ experience with racism in the City, the novel once more invites readers to question race relations in the U.S., disrupting the myth that America is a country of

immigrants. Thus, this above quote becomes a statement on how racism and alienation can “entrap essentially good people in an environment where fear and self-preservation undermine societal boundaries.”³⁷²

Challenging Racism and Oppression: Spivak, Gramsci and Fanon’s Insights:

Ultimately, I am interested in showing that in the U.S., racism works with hegemonic power structures and modernity to not only alienate, marginalize and dehumanize characters like Julius, but to subject them to oppression and systemic injustices. For example, in Gayatri Spivak’s argument, Cole is using his fiction as a means to throw insights into the condition of those Spivak calls the subaltern. That is, those oppressed and marginalized members of the society.

They are groups of immigrants like Julius who are outside of the American hegemonic power structure. They are underrepresented and do not have a say in any decision making process in American society. Spivak argues that characters like this have disappeared into “a violent aporia between subject and object status.”³⁷³ Spivak’s argument suggests that characters like Julius, because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, are relegated to the background in the U.S. These African diaspora communities in the U.S. are excluded and underrepresented in the economic, cultural and political framework of the American society and as a result are denied the promise of the American dreams. Spivak goes on to describe this subaltern population, like the characters portrayed in the novel, as those whose voices are not heard, and those who live on the margin of the society. Their being unheard and marginalized causes their disappearance and alienation, which Spivak further describes in terms of subjugation and silence, prompting her to ask “can the subaltern speak.”³⁷⁴ By invoking such images, Spivak emphasizes the situations of these marginalized African diaspora communities in the U.S., allowing readers to understand the

profound psychological disintegration and community fragmentation these diaspora communities are subjected to in American society.

Like Spivak, Antonio Gramsci in some of his writings, including *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, describes as the subalterns' classes those who have gone through similar predicaments that characters like Julius have gone through. According to Gramsci, the subalterns are the oppressed members of the society, and people of lower and inferior ranks. Elaborating further on the crisis caused by oppression, Gramsci argues that

The crisis creates situations which are dangerous in the short run, since the various strata of the population are not all capable of orienting themselves equally swiftly, or of reorganizing with the same rhythm. The traditional ruling class, which has numerous trained cadres, changes men and programs and, with greater speed than is achieved by the subordinate classes, reabsorbs the control that was slipping from its grasp. Perhaps it may make sacrifices, and expose itself to an uncertain future of demagogic promises; but it retains power, reinforces it for the time being, and uses it to crush its adversary and disperse his leading cadres, who cannot be very numerous or highly trained.³⁷⁵

As the above quote Gramsci demonstrates, characters like Julius fall into the group of the exploited class Gramsci calls "the subordinate classes." These are the underrepresented members of the society who are exploited by the "superior ranks" or those he calls "the traditional ruling class." According to Gramsci's quote above, the subaltern (the subordinate classes) are usually denied access to opportunities and hegemonic power.

When Gramsci was describing the subaltern, he was talking about immigrants like Julius, people who are socially, politically, economically and geographically eliminated from the hegemonic power structure in the American society. Thus, the oppressive and draconian structure of the U.S. society, in particular toward black immigrants like Julius, underscores a troubling trend that suggest that, for people who are considered "others" and "outsiders" like the oppressed characters portrayed in the novel, the alienation created by institutional racism and

systemic oppression in America cannot be “effectively healed without an African locus in which to anchor experience construction.”³⁷⁶

Like Spivak and Gramsci, another intellectual, Martinique-born philosopher, Frantz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin White Masks*, describes the psychological impacts of alienation, and racism on the marginalized populations like Julius, when he says that:

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it’s a Negro.³⁷⁷

In his statement above, Fanon is explaining the destructive consequences of racism, which black immigrants’ likes Julius consistently face in places like the U.S. Hence, like Spivak and Gramsci, Fanon’s argument suggests African diaspora communities like Julius are always seen through the lenses of the white men.

This is evident through Julius’ constant walking and meditation as he journeys all over New York. Regarding his journey in the city, Julius argues that “New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace.”³⁷⁸ New York as used here is a metaphor for the white people Julius encounters in the city. These are the people who are racist toward him and prevent him from achieving his American dreams. Julius’ experiences with racism further explain why Fanon argues that Negros, like Julius, are constantly being “dissected under white eyes.”³⁷⁹ By invoking such representations, Fanon highlights the impacts of institutional racism and injustice not only on African diaspora communities like Julius but also on black people in general. Furthermore, by uncovering the working of systemic racism, Fanon wants people of African descent like Julius to “reclaim history, culture, and a common community as a means of restoring the losses inflicted by slavery and its enduring legacy.”³⁸⁰

As Fanon's argument above suggests, New York City is a confining institution, a prison-like place, where racism and alienation contribute to blacks' alienation and hopelessness. Commenting on Julius' predicaments, for instance, Sheila posits that his condition as an immigrant "created a double barrier for him, cut off from their own cultures by the denial of their birthright, they were also barred from participating as citizens and equals in their New World context."³⁸¹ Meanwhile, Julius calls his confinement in the city of New York an "aimless wandering." Describing his alienation further, Julius argues that "these walks, a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital, steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time, so that I often found myself at quite a distance from home late at night, and was compelled to return home by subway."³⁸²

This constant walking experience Julius endures in the city can be described further as what Sheila calls "colonizer's metropolis."³⁸³ Sheila describes colonizer's metropolis as "an active agent in cultural disjunction through a number of avant-garde narrative and aesthetic strategies that reinforce the physicality of the metropolitan space as symbolic of African diaspora and modernity oppression."³⁸⁴ Like African-Americans formed by the failure of emancipation to deliver true equality, African diaspora populations like Julius are "placed in a position of anticipating full liberation, only to have it denied by systemic prejudices embedded in a system that refuses them human status."³⁸⁵ Fanon's argument above that "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects,"³⁸⁶ mirrors the experiences of immigrants like Julius.

Like Fanon, Sheila also comments on the racial intolerance that immigrants like Julius face in the U.S. She argues that the masters (in this case White Americans) possess total control

over every aspect of black lives, including administering “corporal punishment by whip and abusing them at will.”³⁸⁷ Sheila goes on to argue that the stakes in maintaining the lowly status of immigrants like Julius were both economic necessity as well as a function of established Western European attitudes already embedded in African diaspora and modernity oppression.³⁸⁸ All in all, Julius’ experience with alienation and racism, as portrayed in the novel, stems from his racial background, promoting Sheila to argue that it all boils down from the “racial legacies of Jim Crow and slavery.”³⁸⁹

The racism and hopelessness that characters like Julius experience in New York City, illustrate the ingrained nature of institutional racism and hegemonic power structures in creating the environments in which oppression thrives. Through Julius’ story, Cole underscores the alienation that confronts not only the characters in the novel, but blacks in general, nurtured again by “colonizer’s metropolis,” which is a space in which experience becomes fragmented and alienated in a contradictory environment where equality is promised but never delivered.³⁹⁰ Julius’ experiences with racism and alienation, as illustrated above, are clearly interconnected with his racial background as a black immigrant. Thus, by portraying the various ways in which black immigrants like Julius are oppressed, *Open City* brings to light the pervasive nature of racism and prejudice in the American society.

Conclusion:

The novel ends with Julius still walking aimlessly all over the streets of New York. By ending the novel with Julius still walking and seeing mostly white people everywhere he goes, and the apparent separations that still exist among races, *Open City* accentuates not only the domineering and lingering presence of white oppressors in American societies, but it also

underscores the various American institutions and hegemonic power structure that have worked and continue to work against black diaspora populations like Julius.

As the analysis above accentuates, the experiences of African diaspora communities like Julius, Saidu and many others portrayed in the novel are pathetic and miserable. As a result of their racial and ethnic backgrounds, they are marginalized, subordinated and oppressed in the U.S., a country they embrace, love and consider their “home.” Though the experiences of these African diaspora populations in the U.S. are distressing and unfortunate, Cole uses their stories not only as a means to shed light on the pervasive nature of African diaspora and modernity, hegemonic structure of power and modernity in the U.S. but also to underscore the fact that being African diaspora communities in the U.S. in the U.S. is synonymous to being victims of oppression.

Through these characters’ stories, Cole seems to suggest that no form of justices, equality and freedom can be attained under such racist, draconian and oppressive American systems and institutions. Through these characters’ experiences, not only is Cole shedding light into the ingrained nature of modernity in America but he also wants these oppressions to stop. In other words, he wants these oppressive American institutions to be completely changed and reformed so that African diaspora populations can be liberated and freed from shackles of oppression. Cole’s clamor for change and reform to these American institutions make him an advocate for freedom and equality, a civil rights activist and a social reformer.

Additionally, Cole’s *Open City* underscores the conflict between the ingrained nature of institutional racism and modernity in America and the struggles by these African diaspora communities in the U.S.’ characters portrayed in the novel to overcome them. Specifically, Cole emphasizes these characters’ determination and courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable

obstacles. Through their stories and experiences, Cole highlights these characters' undeniable perseverance and unmitigated determination as they struggle to assimilate into the American society and face a unique assimilation challenge, given America's racial history: finding a niche between the well-established black and white communities.

As portrayed in the novel, Julius and Saidu are some of the characters in the novel who are significantly impacted by the devastating reality of racial discrimination and modernity in America. But these characters do not let the conditions define nor subjugate them. Despite their experiences with racial marginalization, these characters remain strong, courageous and determined. Although these characters are victimized and marginalized, they struggle to overcome their predicaments and pitiable conditions.

In the end, they succeed in negotiating these struggles. For example, Julius, who was often derided and called a "nigger" by many white Americans, did not let these negative images affect nor define him. He works hard as a student, overcoming his obstacles and later becoming a renowned psychiatric doctor in New York, helping the poverty-stricken, marginalized and oppressed members of the society. Reflecting philosophically on his own struggle, life lessons and his success as a person, Julius states that

Who has not, with this consideration in mind, brought something performative into his everyday life? We have the ability to do both good and evil, and more often than not, we choose good. When we don't, neither we nor our imagined audience is troubled, because we are able to articulate ourselves to ourselves, and because we have, through our other decisions, merited their sympathy. They are ready to believe the best about us, and not without good reason. From my point of view, thinking about the story of my life, even without claiming any especially heightened sense of ethics, I am satisfied that I have hewed close to the good.³⁹¹

The above quote accentuates Julius' courage in the face of several obstacles. His ability to look past his predicaments and obstacles not only makes him a survivor but also a hero.

The stories and experiences of these characters, in particular, Julius and Saidu underscore the devastating reality of African diaspora and modernity and modernity in America. Reading about these characters and all that they have gone through, one cannot deny the existence of institutional racism and oppression and abuse of power in America. The presence of these societal injustices and anomalies make it easy for Julius' oppressor to dominate, oppress and marginalize him.

Like many other civil rights activists, social reformers and human right crusaders, Cole often sees the devastating consequences of racial discrimination and modernity on African diaspora communities in the U.S., he understands these problems and realizes that African diaspora communities in the U.S. are victims of these injustices. As a result, he wants complete changes and reforms to these American institutions and systems. He seeks to destroy the structure of power and status quo that marginalize, subordinate and oppress African diaspora communities in the U.S. Whether the American society is going to change for the better is a question that is yet to be answered. But one thing is clear, Cole as a writer has used his power of the pen to seek compelling reforms in the American society, a society where African diaspora populations continue to witness oppression, subordination and marginalization.

Despite the gloomy nature of his experiences, Julius closes his story by stating that his toxic experiences with alienation and racism in the U.S. "are ready to bring out the best about us, and not without good reason. From my point of view, thinking about the story of my life, even without claiming any especially heightened sense of ethics, I am satisfied that I have hewed close to the good."³⁹² This quote suggests that Julius will continue to move forward regardless of all the circumstances that surround him. The above statement also shows Julius' relentless spirit and his ability to remain strong in the face of oppression will not be undermined nor disrupted.

Conclusion: African Dreams of American and Diaspora Experience and Experience

Despite the tremendous age, geographical and cultural gaps among the diaspora African authors explored in this dissertation, the approach they employ in their fictional narratives share compelling characteristics. In their books, they use African diaspora and modernity, post-colonial criticism not only as a means to explore the complexity of diaspora experience but also to indict global modernity, racism, structural and institutional oppression perpetrated against African diaspora communities in the United States. This study has shown that the African dream of America is different but also exemplary of the American experience and therefore a privileged lens for understanding “America.” The African immigrant experience provides an especially interesting plan to explore the promise and broken promises of American and global modernity. Many of us Africans achieve those promises in terms of upward economic mobility and education. We, however, undeniably confront the obstacles of a racist social order.

Furthermore, these African diaspora writings accentuate not only the complexities of diaspora experiences but they attempt to unmask the workings of African diaspora and modernity on these diaspora communities in America. Furthermore, their writings attempt to expose the idea of return to the homeland, patriarchal norms, tradition and culture, especially in Ghana, and their devastating consequences for characters like Eulalie. These writers attempt to subvert dominant Euro-American norm of literary canon, utilizing them as a means to expose African’s American dreams and the complexity of diaspora experience. In an American society in which African diaspora populations are marginalized, oppressed and dehumanized and in which African dreams of America often turn into a deception, these African diaspora authors all use African diaspora and modernity literary strategies to unmask the complexities of African diaspora experience.

This study began as an intervention into African's dreams of America, with a particular focus on the complexity of diaspora experience, employing African diaspora and modernity literary approach. I sought to examine the American dreams of Africans in contemporary American society in order to investigate how they are constructed and represented in fictional narratives by African diaspora writers, including Chimamanda Adichie in *Americanah*, Aidoo's in *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Cole in *Open City* and *Everyday Is for the Thief*. I analyzed these texts to understand not only how these marginalized African diaspora populations and the affluent, upper-middle class of immigrants alike, faced an onslaught of the deleterious consequences of African racial oppression, and the disappointing reality of the American dreams, but also how these representations might shed light upon the historical specificity of the African trans-national American diaspora experience. Of equal importance is how African diaspora and modernity texts critically engage and exemplify the American experience and global African diaspora and modernity, which itself looks at the heart of the African diasporic condition.

This conclusion returns to important information necessary to understanding the characters portrayed in the novels, who these African diaspora authors are, why they write, and a short profile about each of these writers for the purpose of putting the study in a proper perspective. Moreover, I contextualize their writings by engaging them with African diaspora and modernity literary criticism and how the African dreams of America and its deception is an intervention into post-African diaspora and modernity. The conclusion also engages the question of the American dreams and how television shows like *The Cosby Show* has helped to perpetuate a false notion of the American Dreams. Lastly, I discussed how this idea of this study was conceived, how it contributes to American studies as a discipline, the limitations of this study,

the challenges I faced writing the dissertation, what I learned in the writing process and how this study contributes to knowledge.

In this study, I have argued for an African diaspora and modernity literary approach to illuminate and interpret American dreams of Africans. I accentuated how analyzing African dreams of America and the complexities of diaspora experience as represented in these African novels allows us to complicate and challenge hegemonic structure of power in the U.S., and unmask the history and construction of racism, and systemic oppression, which exclude not only these African diaspora communities but various other marginalized subaltern populations, including whites.

Furthermore, I have worked to illuminate how through these writings, we can understand how the American dreams is consumed, critiqued and reworked and how it became an African dreams of America that is simultaneously a deception of America's promise denied. In the process, the works of these African diaspora writers become a privileged place for understanding our common America from the perspective of African diaspora and modernity African critique. Through this study, I have learned that the experience of African diaspora and modernity, and the disappointing reality of the African dreams of America, have been paramount not only in African diaspora communities in the U.S., but also with other racial groups, including white Americans.

African Dreams of America: Post-colonialism, Diaspora and Modernity:

Responding to the disappointing reality of the American dreams for the African diaspora populations in the U.S., the destructive impacts of oppression and systemic injustices on these immigrants' communities, the entrenched nature of hegemonic structure of power in America,

Cole, Aidoo and Adichie use their writings and engaging a post-colonial, African diaspora and modernity framework to expose and renounce these factors and to empower these African diaspora populations, break barriers working against their progress and to restore their humanity. Therefore, my analysis of the relationship between the African diasporic experience, African dreams of America and deception and these writers' works will serve as an African diaspora and modernity intervention.

Adichie, Cole and Aidoo are three of the most prominent and pioneers of African authors writing about African immigration. Not only are these three writers from different cultural background but they belong to different generations. Aidoo was born in 1942 and started writing in the 1960s while Adichie and Cole were born in 1977 and 1975 respectively. Adichie and Cole wrote their first novels in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Aidoo's first novel, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* was written in 1964. While Aidoo and Adichie were born in Ghana and Nigeria respectively, Cole was born by Nigerian immigrants in the U.S. He and his parents returned to Nigeria shortly after his birth. While these writers belong to different age groups and cultural backgrounds, their writings share significant characteristics. In their works, they underscore hegemonic structure of power in America and the disappointing reality, while projecting the dehumanizing conditions these immigrants endure in a racist and oppressive society, where being immigrants can be tantamount to being treated as second class citizens.

Resisting their stereotypical and disparaging representation in America and using their writings as a tool for self-empowerment and healing, and not accepting their inherited role as backward and uncivilized people, these African diaspora writers successfully reformulate and redefine their demeaning representations, "creating strong, realistic characters, who question dominant power structure and attempt to transform them."³⁹³ Although, the characters

represented in these novels have endured trauma and psychological violence caused by racial oppression and modernity, they nevertheless manage "to transcend their passive, violated status in order to recreate and/or maintain, to varying degrees, an active subject-self."³⁹⁴ Commenting further on this immigrant American dreams, Kempen posits that these writers represent "a version of Fanon's experience of fragmentation caused by colonizers gaze, projecting onto the colonized centuries of black stereotypes, including cannibalism and hyper-sexuality."³⁹⁵ For the characters represented in these novels, this means being systemically silenced and dehumanized. For example, Ifemelu, Adichie's protagonist in *Americanah* is disenfranchised and devalued not only because she is a woman but also because she is an African immigrant. This explains why her school mate call her a "nigger," an American term of racial denigration.

Furthermore, these African writers employ post-colonial, African diaspora and modernity literary framework as a means to expose the disappointing reality of the American dreams not only for African diaspora populations in the U.S. but other racial groups, including white Americans. That is, the rejection of global modernity and American power structure informs all of these writers' works. Their writings are designed to expose and reject the corrupt U.S. oppression and global modernity and subvert the status quo power infrastructure and hegemony constructed to dehumanize them, while appropriating the dominant Euro-American literary canon that has for decades dehumanize these writers and their people. In a society and system where African diaspora communities in the U.S. are devalued and in the words of Petty Sheila "treated as a commodity to be exploited," Cole, Adichie and Aidoo use their writings, and post-colonial, African diaspora and modernity literary criticism, as strategies to expose the unrealistic nature of the American dreams and to reject the assault deep-rooted in such oppressive and draconian system.

The works of these authors reflect not only their own experiences with global modernity racial oppression and hegemonic structure of power in America but also the experience of this African diaspora communities and their failure to achieve the American dreams. It is here that my African diaspora and modernity analysis takes a turn. The works of some of my authors both implicitly and explicitly and consciously and unconsciously demonstrate their African diaspora and modernity critiques are themselves embedded in the global forces that are also African diaspora and modernity. Analyzing these authors' writings, this dissertation has accentuated their thoughts and beliefs about the American society and in particular, the African diaspora community's American dreams, employing a post-colonial and modernity literary criticism as a viable response to the exploitative consequences of racial subjugation and what Kempen calls the "physical and psychological violence of hegemonic forces."³⁹⁶

In Cole's *Open City*, for example, Julius, the novel protagonist, an immigrant from Nigeria, is dehumanized and alienated as a result of several factors, including global modernity and the damaging impacts of injustices that he faces living in New York and Brussels. Rather than achieve the American dreams, he is subjected to violence and alienation. Julius is disenfranchised and confined to the margin of the American and Belgium societies and as a result is unable to realize his African American dreams. However, despite his negative experience in America, Julius is able to disrupt the obstacles placed in his path. As Kempen argues further, Julius, against his "oppressors' violence and manipulation, manages to retain or rebirth a sense of self, by jealously guarding an inaccessible portion of his being for himself."³⁹⁷ By employing a post-colonial, African diaspora and modernity approach, not only did this study expose the workings and dynamics of hegemonic structure of power in America and the negative

consequences of global modernity but it serves to empower this subaltern African diaspora population, giving voices to this silenced and marginalized groups.

As an intervention into American Studies, this study has demonstrated the multiple ways in which African immigration to the United States, in particular African dream of America, is fundamental to the issues of nationality, “belonging,” “African diaspora and modernity,” experience and race. As a project in trans-nationalism, African diaspora and modernity and hegemonic structure of power, this study has established that while post-cost colonialism is a useful and forceful tool in the fight against oppression, patriarchy, institutional racism and modernity, it can also be oppressive and devastating to other marginalized groups. In other words, the study accentuates that while post-colonialism is a powerful and persuasive tool for African nationalists and subaltern populations in their crusade against oppression, it also challenges the ideas of post-colonialism and modernity because they can serve as oppressive tool designed to marginalize and dehumanize other oppressed populations.

For example, in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, the depiction of the relationship between Eulalie and the Ghanaians shows that while post-colonialism and nationalism can be liberating, they come with a cost, especially for women like Eulalie. For instance, in the process of defending their culture and tradition against Euro-American catastrophic intrusions and distortions, fighting against injustices, oppression and systemic racism, the Ghanaian natives, who are themselves victims of institutional racism, are also dehumanizing, objectifying and oppressing Eulalie. This is one of the ironies of post-colonialism, African diaspora and modernity theories. Hence, the study represents a critique of post-colonialism and modernity and nationalist ideologies.

Furthermore, using these African authors' works, this study has critiqued the impacts of global modernity on these disempowered African diaspora populations. Rather than espouse and reinforce Euro-American beliefs and dominant paradigm, and paying keen attention to African diaspora and modernity contradictions, I employ a post-colonial literary criticism as a means to renounce global modernity and hegemonic structure of power, while calling into question Euro-American-dominated forms of knowledge and establishing a space where African immigrant can be empowered, and in the process subverting the dominant paradigm. Kempen argues that all these authors "attain self and community liberation through their writings. They recognize the limitations of dominant, patriarchal languages and bring the wealth of their own linguistic and personal experiences to their writing."³⁹⁸

These writers, disenfranchised and objectified, refused to be defined by such demeaning stereotypes and representations. They refuse to be victims, but instead transforming themselves into powerful agents for change and regenerating forces, using their writings as tool to destroy injustices and hegemonic structure of power. Commenting on these writers and their ability to turn their negative experience into a positive force for change in the society, Kempen argues that these writers

Have transmuted themselves from object status—enforced linguistically, culturally, ideologically, and, in many cases, legally—to regenerating forces. Instead of *maitresses*, they become *maitres*, wielding their authority over others, but powerful matrixes, who have mastered (*maitres*) the dominant paradigm. Active transformers, they recognize the encapsulation they have been subjected to, and expand their powers of (self)-representation by coming to writing in a dominant language.³⁹⁹

Moreover, the African dreams of America and the American dreams and deception explored in this study accentuates post-colonialism, African diaspora, racism and the American dreams deceptions as conflict sites. Not only is my analysis of this immigrant American dreams an

intervention into post- colonialism, African diaspora and modernity but they underscore why negotiating transnational space and experience are indispensable to understanding African diaspora communities. These immigrants struggle to achieve the American dreams and the damaging impacts of global modernity create tensions that continue to subject this African diaspora populations' American dreams into a deception.

Ultimately, the writings of Cole, Adichie and Aidoo have in many ways changed the way we think about the African dream of America, African diaspora and modernity, capitalism and race in America. To illustrate, this study demonstrates that television shows like *the Cosby Show* has significantly helped to blur the line between the American dreams, reality and falsehood. Although the *Cosby Show* is a fantasy, many African diaspora communities like me, and the characters portrayed in these novels are seduced and lured into the U.S. by the positive images of black people represented on the show. We accepted it, bought into it, because it did a certain work for us. In so doing, we participated in it and reproduced global African diaspora and modernity and (post) colonialism, African diaspora and modernity's oppression including global and national forms of racial inequality.

This individual television series cannot and should not be held responsible for the failures these diaspora immigrant communities face in America, but the discourse it represents clearly is a discursive force in our oppression and why we, ourselves, participate in it. This is because for audiences in America and worldwide, "the admission of black characters to television's upwardly mobile world gives credence to the idea that racial divisions, whether perpetuated by class or by racism, do not exist."⁴⁰⁰

During the course of this research, I realized that there is still a great deal more to understand when it comes to African immigration, the African dream of Americas, race, African

diaspora and modernity. However, this study has provided a compelling and unique insight into the construction of these factors in America. The study also presented a model for the interpretation of immigrant fictional narratives by African writers, the African dream of Americas and African diaspora and modernity. What I discovered, in essence, was that not only is the African dream of Americas a deception but the myth of the American dreams is being constantly perpetuated and negotiated in popular culture like *the Cosby Show*, providing false representation of American life for all racial groups, including whites.

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- ⁵ Ibid., 2
- ⁶ Quoted from Ruben Munoz-Larrondo *Living in Two Worlds: A African diaspora and modernity Readings of the Acts of the Apostles*.
- ⁷ Munoz-Larrondo, 7
- ⁸ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 192
- ⁹ Munoz-Larrondo, 3
- ¹⁰ San Juan, 10.
- ¹¹ Munoz-Larrondo, 2-3
- ¹² Bartlett-Pack 171
- ¹³ Silva, 455-456
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 456
- ¹⁵ Sheila, 20
- ¹⁶ Nyahhongo, 4
- ¹⁷ Sheila, 19
- ¹⁸ Takyi, 45

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- ²⁰ Arthur, vii
- ²¹ Porter, 12-13
- ²² Ibid. vii
- ²³ Arthur, 6.
- ²⁴ Gordon, 84
- ²⁵ Arthur, 41
- ²⁶ Porter, 62
- ²⁷ Silver, 455-456
- ²⁸ Ibid, 456.
- ²⁹ Ibid. 3
- ³⁰ Ibid, 7
- ³¹ Ibid. 60
- ³² Ibid. 220
- ³³ Ibid. 5
- ³⁴ Ibid. 221
- ³⁵ Ibid. 60
- ³⁶ Ibid. 45

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- ³⁷ Gilroy 60
³⁸ Ibid. 74
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⁴⁰ Bartlett-Pack, 171.
⁴¹ Ama Ata Aidoo. "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo
⁴² Aidoo, 57
⁴³ Thiongo, 4
⁴⁴ McLean, 14.
⁴⁵ Parenti, 4
⁴⁶ Quoted in Eric William, 1964, 32
⁴⁷ Huddleston Trevor. 57-58
⁴⁸ Aidoo, 32
⁴⁹ Thiongo, 2
⁵⁰ Ibid., 37
⁵¹ Thiongo, 2
⁵² Aidoo, 10
⁵³ Innes 587
⁵⁴ Aidoo, 57
⁵⁵ Ibid., 43
⁵⁶ Ibid., 34
⁵⁷ Ibid., 86
⁵⁸ Aidoo, 87
⁵⁹ Thiongo, 16
⁶⁰ Hunt, 52
⁶¹ Asiedu 14
⁶² Chapman, 65
⁶³ Aidoo, 83.
⁶⁴ Ibid., 16, 18
⁶⁵ Sheila, 89.
⁶⁶ Chapman 14
⁶⁷ Asiedu, 4
⁶⁸ Chapman.14, 30
⁶⁹ Ibid., 14
⁷⁰ Ibid., 25
⁷¹ Shohat and Stam, 16
⁷² Aidoo, 25
⁷³ Shohat and Stam, 17
⁷⁴ Bartlett-Pack, 171
⁷⁵ Ezewanebe, 352.
⁷⁶ Ogundipe , 45
⁷⁷ Sutherland. 3
⁷⁸ Bartlett-Pack, 171.
⁷⁹ Aidoo, 35
⁸⁰ Benschhoff and Griffin, 217
⁸¹ Ezewanebe, 351
⁸² Benschhoff and Griffin, 218

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- ⁸³ Ibid., 218
⁸⁴ Ibid., 217
⁸⁵ Aidoo, 81
⁸⁶ Spivak, 61
⁸⁷ Aidoo, 81
⁸⁸ Nyanhongo, 1
⁸⁹ Sheila, 112
⁹⁰ Aidoo, 67
⁹¹ Ibid., 47
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⁹³ Aidoo, 86
⁹⁴ Kempen, 147
⁹⁵ Ibid, 147
⁹⁶ Ibid., 36

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⁹⁸ Ibid., 7
⁹⁹ Adichie, 1
¹⁰⁰ Najmh, 274
¹⁰¹ Sheila, 111.
¹⁰² Iwuchukwu, 3.
¹⁰³ Sheila, 15
¹⁰⁴ Ochiel, 1
¹⁰⁵ Sheila, 69.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 69
¹⁰⁷ Adichie, 99.
¹⁰⁸ (Cited from Adichie’s Interview with Carl Wilkinson. “I left home to find home: The prize-winning author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, discovered her true experience as a Nigerian only by moving abroad.” *The Guardian*: 5 March 2005.
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¹¹⁰ Moya and Markus, 23
¹¹¹ Roderick, 207.
¹¹² Michelle, Alexander, 23
¹¹³ Benschhoff and Griffin, 47
¹¹⁴ Arun. 27
¹¹⁵ Ibid., 27
¹¹⁶ Winant and Omi, 15
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 15, 16, 19
¹¹⁸ Hodge, 51.
¹¹⁹ Sheila, 103.
¹²⁰ Adichie, 5
¹²¹ Reiff, 31.
¹²² Ibid., 31
¹²³ Adichie, 6
¹²⁴ Ibid., 6

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- ¹²⁵ Reiff, 33
¹²⁶ Ibid., 32
¹²⁷ Adichie, 138
¹²⁸ Ibid., 4
¹²⁹ Ibid., 6
¹³⁰ Sheila, 108
¹³¹ Reiff, 32
¹³² Adichie, 3.
¹³³ Ibid., 3.
¹³⁴ McClure, 137,
¹³⁵ Adichie, 4
¹³⁶ Najmh, 275
¹³⁷ Ibid., 275
¹³⁸ Adichie, 27
¹³⁹ Ibid., 23
¹⁴⁰ Najmh, 275
¹⁴¹ Adichie, 19-20
¹⁴² Najmh, 275
¹⁴³ Adichie, 4
¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 47
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4
¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 4
¹⁴⁷ Petty, 207
¹⁴⁸ Adichie 88
¹⁴⁹ Affiah, 285
¹⁵⁰ Ochiel, 1
¹⁵¹ Ibid., 1
¹⁵² Sheila, 115
¹⁵³ Adichie, 131
¹⁵⁴ Ibid.,131
¹⁵⁵ Sheila, 207
¹⁵⁶ Adichie, 131
¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 131
¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 132.
¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 132
¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 233
¹⁶¹ Ibid. 132
¹⁶² Uwakweh 26-27
¹⁶³ Sheila, 26
¹⁶⁴ Adichie, 132
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 132
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 133
¹⁶⁷ Ochiel, 1
¹⁶⁸ Adichie, 3
¹⁶⁹ Abati 1
¹⁷⁰ Adichie, 145

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- ¹⁷¹ Ibid., 6
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¹⁷³ Adichie, 23
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 23
¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 75
¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 13
¹⁷⁷ Perry, 72
¹⁷⁸ Ochiel, 1
¹⁷⁹ Navaratnam 1.
¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.
¹⁸¹ The Guardian, March 5, 2005
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¹⁸³ Adichie, 133.
¹⁸⁴ Uwakweh 27
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¹⁸⁷ Navaratnam 1
¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 1
¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 1
¹⁹⁰ Sheila, 30.
¹⁹¹ Najmh, 275

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- ¹⁹² Adichie, 158
¹⁹³ Sheila, 108
¹⁹⁴ Uwakweh, 47
¹⁹⁵ Bartlett-Pack, 171.
¹⁹⁶ Wise, 1
¹⁹⁷ Adichie, 434
¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 132-133
¹⁹⁹ Parenti, 5
²⁰⁰ Raz, 1
²⁰¹ James Adams, 1931, 404.
²⁰² Moore, 27
²⁰³ Abati, 11
²⁰⁴ Ibid., 10-11
²⁰⁵ Jhally and Lewis, 3
²⁰⁶ Asante, 34
²⁰⁷ Asante, 78
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²⁰⁹ Ibid., 22
²¹⁰ Ibid., 78
²¹¹ Ibid., 7
²¹² Ibid., 99

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²¹⁴ Melody, 1-2
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²¹⁶ Ibid., 5
²¹⁷ Jhally and Lewis, 17, 18
²¹⁸ Ibid., 1
²¹⁹ Bowley, Ember, and Hurdle, 1.
²²⁰ Jhally and Lewis, 2
²²¹ Adichie, 128
²²² Adichie, 3
²²³ Nyanhongo, 19
²²⁴ Adichie, 273.
²²⁵ Jhally and Lewis, 1
²²⁶ Adichie, 7
²²⁷ Sut and Lewis, 61.
²²⁸ Ibid, 61
²²⁹ Ibid., 3
²³⁰ Ibid., 6
²³¹ Dyson. 5
²³² Centre for Population Economics, 44.
²³³ Adichie, 105
²³⁴ Petty, 247
²³⁵ Adichie, 108
²³⁶ Adichie, 131
²³⁷ Nyanhongo, 1
²³⁸ Adichie, 6
²³⁹ Ibid., 7
²⁴⁰ Ibid., 4
²⁴¹ Ibid., 4
²⁴² Affiah, 284
²⁴³ Affiah, 285
²⁴⁴ Perry, 1
²⁴⁵ Adichie, 112
²⁴⁶ Adichie, 132
²⁴⁷ Nyanhongo, 1
²⁴⁸ Adichie, 81
²⁴⁹ Ibid., 82
²⁵⁰ Ibid., 81
²⁵¹ Uwakweh, 27-28
²⁵² Uwakweh, 28
²⁵³ Adichie, 81
²⁵⁴ Uwakweh, 28
²⁵⁵ Adichie, 3
²⁵⁶ Adichie, 3
²⁵⁷ Petty, 220
²⁵⁸ Ochiel, 1

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- ²⁵⁹ Adichie, 6
²⁶⁰ Sheila, 115
²⁶¹ Petty, 87
²⁶² Adichie, 42
²⁶³ Adichie, 42-44
²⁶⁴ Petty, 89
²⁶⁵ Adichie, 16
²⁶⁶ Ibid., 17
²⁶⁷ Sheila, 103
²⁶⁸ Ibid., 103.

Notes on Chapter Four: The Other Culprits: *Open City* and *Every day is for the Thief*.

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²⁷⁰ Fanon, 53
²⁷¹ Freeman, 1
²⁷² Sheila, 118
²⁷³ Shohat and Stam, 15-16.
²⁷⁴ Toluhi, 47.
²⁷⁵ Cole, 173
²⁷⁶ Ibid., 92
²⁷⁷ Ibid., 63
²⁷⁸ Ibid., 56
²⁷⁹ Sheila, 89
²⁸⁰ Ibid., 115
²⁸¹ Ibid., 118
²⁸² Cole 63
²⁸³ Sheila 112
²⁸⁴ Sheila, 119
²⁸⁵ Cole, 31-32
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²⁸⁷ Sheila, 67
²⁸⁸ Cole, 20
²⁸⁹ Ibid., 19
²⁹⁰ Ibid., 92
²⁹¹ Sheila, 114
²⁹² Cole, 6
²⁹³ Ibid., 74
²⁹⁴ Ibid., 254
²⁹⁵ Ibid., 56
²⁹⁶ Sheila, 115
²⁹⁷ Sheila, 87
²⁹⁸ Cole, 17
²⁹⁹ Affiah, 284-285
³⁰⁰ Ibid., 284
³⁰¹ Cole, 30
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- 303 Abati, 11
304 Petty, 119
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- 313 Ibid., 235
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315 Olorunsiwa, an Interview with Teju Cole
316 Cole, 72
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318 Parenti, 4
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361 Sheila, 115
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364 Cole, 236
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373 Spivak, 306
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³⁹⁰ Ibid, 118

³⁹¹ Cole, 243

³⁹² Ibid., 243

Notes on the Conclusion: (African) American Critique

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³⁹⁴ Ibid, 147

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³⁹⁶ Ibid, 148

³⁹⁷ Ibid, 149

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 14

³⁹⁹ Ibid, 148

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