

**Double / Triple Consciousness in Adichie's *Americanah*:
A Black Feminist Reading**

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Abstract

The term "double consciousness" was first coined by W.B. Du Bois in his renowned *The Souls of Black Folk* in which he epitomized the dilemma of Black Americans in the U.S.A. Du Bois illuminates the fact that the blacks are mainly seen behind a "veil", that is, their skin / race determines their relationship with White Americans. However, Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" has been criticized because it fails to represent the complexities of the black woman experience. In addition, Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" has been revisited by black feminists who incorporate gender and race within the "double consciousness" dilemma. In this way, the term "triple consciousness" emerged out of Du Bois's concept to explain how gender, class and race intersect to affect black women and undermine their individuality. This paper aims to investigate how Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) displays the intersecting oppressions of poverty, race and gender on Afro-American women. The paper also aims to show how Adichie manages to incorporate important issues within her novel such as the process of identity formation and the double /triple consciousness both male and female black/Afro- American go through as a result of their experience of suffering due to racial, social and gender prejudices. That the novel depicts how race and gender shape the white mentality and undermine Afro-Americans because of their "veil", i.e., skin colour, and how their experience in the West proves that it is still affected by old colonial concepts which judge people on the basis of race, gender or class will be also explored in this paper. The process of identity formation the main characters go through will be illuminated through a "bildungsroman" form which is different from conventional "bildungsroman."

Keywords: double /triple consciousness, black feminism, "bildungsroman," Adichie, *Americanah*.

The term "double consciousness" was first coined by W.B. Du Bois in his renowned *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in which he epitomized the dilemma of Black Americans in the U.S.A. Du Bois illuminates the fact that blacks are mainly seen behind a "veil", that is, their skin / race determines their relationship with White Americans. In other words, the "veil"/skin becomes a metaphor that symbolizes the physical and psychological suffering of the African American who is forced to perceive him / herself as a subhuman or other. Such suffering results in what Du Bois terms as "double consciousness." According to Du Bois, the black is

born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world – a world which yields no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body. (38)

The problem of the Afro-American is that he desperately tries to reconcile his divided identity, "to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (39). He longs to be seen and accepted as both an African and American, "without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows" (38). The African American suffers as long as he conceives himself through the "veil." Therefore, Du Bois adds, it is the duty of the African American not to lift the veil off completely but to lift it up, i.e., to change it so that he can merge his double self into a "better and truer self" (38).

Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" is further elaborated by Gilroy in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. According to Gilroy, the term: "double consciousness" is not only restricted to the experience of Africans in America, but is extended to encompass the essentialist notion of race in general. Gilroy argues that Du Bois' concept disrupts strictly racial identities propagated throughout oppressive White society. Du Bois' concept is, thus, enlarged to include global-diasporic, or to use Gilroy's term, "Black Atlantic" perspective that lies behind the "meaning of being black" that is in conflict with and hidden under "the smooth flow of African – American exceptionalism" (120).

Similarly, Paget Henry, in his "Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications," identifies the concept of "double consciousness" as part of a

"comprehensive phenomenology of Africana self-consciousness" (85). Unlike Hegel's concept of lordship and bondage, Du Bois's "double-consciousness" – according to Henry – is "the theorizing of a period of racial/imperial domination in the self-consciousness of the Africana subject that is absent from the life of Hegel's European subject" (94). Furthermore, Henry describes the experience of the "Africana" subject as a "categoric form of self-blindness ... a classic case of false consciousness" (90).

Illuminating the two-fold nature of Du Bois's question: "How does it feel to be a problem?" Lewis Gordon, in his Introduction to *Africana Philosophy*, explains that it confirms the "humanity of /subjectivity of the black person, and, at the same time, denies him that humanity" (76). He adds that "the appeal to blacks as problem-people is an assertion of their ultimate location outside the system of order and rationality" (76). The outsider "condition", according to Gordon, is essential to the formation of double-consciousness as it leads to the "splitting of worlds and consciousness itself according to the norms of the U.S. society and its contradictions" (77). In other words, the black American is forced to perceive himself according to the norms set by the predominantly White American society. He is regarded as a non-citizen or a second class citizen.

The same view is adopted by Gooding-Williams in his *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*. According to Gooding-Williams:

In essence, double consciousness is the false selfconsciousness that obtains among African Americans when they observe and judge themselves from the perspective of a white, Jim Crow American world that betrays the ideal of reciprocal recognition due to a contemptuous, falsifying prejudice that inaccurately represents Negro life. (80)

Gooding – Williams argues that "double consciousness" is a form of false self-consciousness which is necessary for the "twoness" experience illuminated by Du Bois. Regarded as a conflict between two sets of ideals, such experience is described by Gooding-Williams as "conflictual two-ness" (82) Commenting on Du Bois's concept, Gooding-Williams adds:

When the Negro judges himself on the basis of American standards, he applies those standards to a particular picture he has of himself. Where racial prejudice prevails, that picture expresses a falsifying double consciousness that misrepresents Negro life. (81)

Whereas Du Bois argues that the formation of the merging of two selves into a better self would only take place of the racial prejudice which affects the perception of the black American as other ends, Gooding-Williams argues that this could only happen if there is mutual recognition on the parts of both the black and the white. A "true self-consciousness," therefore, can be formed where the black American is no longer perceived as inferior by white culture. Only mutual recognition and full equality can overcome double consciousness.

Kirkland uses DuBois's "double consciousness" to refer the experience of both male and female African Americans. He argues that:

Du Bois 'double consciousness' refers to a black person's felt awareness of the harmfully comparative measures of others on his/her character and self-esteem, by which s/he takes herself to be a problem in and of a social arrangement permitting such measures or obliging them. (144)

Moreover, Kirkland argues that both male and female African Americans are aware of their devaluation. The consequences of "double consciousness," according to Kirkland, can take two forms: a "dual/ duellist" hazard of internal conflict of deflated expectations as well as a "duplicitous" form of hypocrisy" (145). Furthermore, Kirkland adds a third form of "double consciousness" to Du Bois' concept, i.e., "dyadic" form which "reflect[s], via education, the result of an individual coming to a true, non-estranged comprehension of the position s/he deserves in comparison to other as both a citizen and a person of color with certain talents and competences" (142). Such "non-estranged compression" of "double consciousness" can be considered, from Kirkland's point of view, a "solution to the hazards" of the other two forms of double consciousness (142).

In fact, Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" has been criticized for neglecting the black women experience. For example, the black historian Darlene Clark Hine exclaims that "had Du Bois specifically included the experiences and lives of black women in his lament, ... instead of writing, 'one ever feels his twoness,' he would have mused about how one feels her 'fiveness': Negro, American, women, poor, black women" (338). Similarly, Smith Shown Michelle, in her *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race and Visual Culture*, describes the "double consciousness" discourse as a "masculine African American dynamic" (38). Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" is, thus, criticized because it fails to represent the complexities of the black woman experience. Similarly, Anna Julia Cooper, in her *A Voice from the South*, states that "only the black woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of

my woman head, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole ... race enters with me" (3).

Furthermore, Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" has been revisited by black feminists who incorporate gender and race within the "double consciousness" dilemma. In this way, the term "triple consciousness" emerged out of Du Bois's concept to explain the difficulties often encountered by black women in America due to poverty, race and gender. Unlike Du Bois, black feminists attempt to explore how gender, class and race intersect to affect black women and undermine their individuality. Moreover, the dilemma of the black woman is intensified by the fact that she is not only neglected by black society but also by white feminism.

In her "Double Jeopardy," Beale condemns the capitalist system for undermining black women. The term "double jeopardy" is used to refer to the dual effect of capitalism and racism on black women which render their experience different from both white women and black men as well. The black women have been exploited by the capitalist system and later by racism. They were "economically exploited and physically assaulted" (146). Besides, the capitalist system has destroyed black family by dehumanizing both man and woman. Beale illuminates that "Many black women tend to accept the capitalist evaluation of manhood and womanhood and believed, in fact, that black men were shiftless and lazy, otherwise they would get a job and support their families as they ought to do" (146).

Furthermore, the black woman has not only been a "slave of a slave," but she has also been a "scapegoat" for the evils of the capitalist system. She has been economically exploited. "It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome" (148). In addition, in their struggle for freedom and equality, the black women are completely different from white women. According to Beale, the "white women's liberation movement is basically middle class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that most black women are subjected to day by day" (153). Moreover, Beale adds, "if the white groups do not realize that they are in fact fighting capitalism and racism, we do not have common bonds" (153).

Like Beale, Deborah King foresees several forms of jeopardy that result in multiple consciousness. She adds class to both gender and race as means of oppression that affect black woman: "racism, sexism and classism constitute three

interdependent control systems. An interactive model, which I have termed multiple jeopardy" (47). This interactive model that determines the conditions of black women's lives is neither fixed nor absolute but, rather, is dependent on the socio-historical context and the social phenomenon under consideration" (49). Furthermore, King criticizes black feminist movements for excluding and devaluing the experience of black women (58).

In fact, the failure of black and white discourse to acknowledge gender, class and race as intersecting factors determining the experience of black woman urged Crenshaw to develop the concept of "intersectionality". Like the intersection of traffic in various directions, for Crenshaw, "if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination" (149). In addition, the black woman is subject to the same discrimination which is experienced by the white woman. Besides, as Crenshaw puts it,

sometimes, they share very similar experience from Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practice which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. (149)

Collins develops Crenshaw's concept of "intersectionality" to refer to interconnected systems of oppression that are inflected by race, gender and social class. She even distinguishes between "intersectionality" and "matrix of domination" to show how oppression affects the experience of black women. She adds that:

Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression. (*Black Sexual Politics* 18)

Furthermore, Collins argues that there is “no homogeneous Black woman's standpoint exists. There is no essential or archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and there by authentic” (28). According to Collins, this is due to the fact that "an essentialist understanding of a Black

woman's standpoint suppresses differences among Black women in search of an elusive group unity" (28). Instead, Collins argues that "it may be more accurate to say that a Black women's collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges" (28).

Americanah displays the intersecting oppressions of poverty, race and gender on Afro-American women. Formed out of seven parts, *Americanah* may be read solely as a love story between Ifemelu and Obinze and the difficulties they encounter in their native country, Nigeria, which forced them to move to America and England in order to fulfil their aspirations. The novel recounts their suffering in America and England due to racial and gender discrimination. Their experience as immigrants in Western society has completely affected their characters and changed their perspectives that they decided to go back home to their native country. Adichie manages to incorporate important issues within this love story such as the process of identity formation which mark the protagonists' coming of age, the double/triple consciousness both male and female black/Afro-American go through as a result of their experience of suffering due to racial, social and gender prejudices. Consequently, they are forced to perceive themselves through the eyes of the Other. The novel is also keen to show how race and gender shape the white mentality and undermine Afro-Americans because of their "veil", i.e., skin colour and their attempts to cope with the white norms. According to Sackeyfio, *Americanah*:

vividly captures the challenges of hybridized existence in the alien landscapes of the West, African immigrant experiences in Western spaces confront the challenge of assimilation of incongruent lifestyles, behaviours and Western values. Adichie has skillfully woven a tapestry of familiar themes of gender dynamics, dislocation and the struggle to survive in transnational spaces. (215)

Indeed, *Americanah* presents a non-conventional migration story of Ifemelu and her lover Obinze who leave their country to the West in order to fulfil their dreams. However, their experience in both America and England shows that the West is still affected by old colonial concepts which judge people on the basis of race, gender or class. The intersection of these three forces result in a deep identity crisis or, to use Du Bois' terms, "double-consciousness," the feeling of "two-ness," being Other even to oneself. Such crisis is even more intensified in the case of Ifemelu who goes through a deeper suffering as a result of having "triple consciousness," the fact that she has to suffer because she is African, poor and

also a black woman. The process of identity formation both Ifemelu and Obinze go through is illuminated through a bildungsroman form.

The representation of the interaction of gender, race and class in *Americanah* and their effect on both black man and woman is depicted first in the Nigerian society and later in both England and America. The novel condemns the patriarchal society in these settings. Lorber argues that "as part of a *stratification* society, gender ranks men above women of the same race and class" (32, Italics in original). Privileging men over women has become normal and even accepted in both African and Western societies. Consequently, as Adichie declares: "If we do something over and over again, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over again, it becomes normal" (*We Should All Be Feminists* 13). Being male, Obinze has been granted power and privilege more than Ifemelu. During her childhood, Ifemelu recollects how her parents support concepts of gender. Her father was fired for "refusing to call his new boss Mummy," and came home "complaining about the absurdity of a grown man calling a grown woman Mummy because she has decided it was the best way to show her respect" (*Am.* 56). As a conventional male brought up in a male dominated tradition, Ifemelu's father cannot accept the fact that he can work under a female authority and chooses to bring about the poverty of his family for that.

In her *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie, furthermore, illuminates the shortcomings of her Nigerian society: "these Nigerians have been raised to think of women as inherently guilty. And they have been raised to expect so little of men that the idea of men as savage beings with no self-control is somehow acceptable" (33). When Ifemelu's mother converts to Christianity, Ifemelu has to attend Sunday school. She is displeased with Ifemelu's questioning of the nuns as well as her unfeminine conduct. During one of her religious lessons, Ifemelu is told by the nuns that "Any girl wears tight trousers wants to commit the sin of temptation" (*Am.* 61). According to the nuns or the religious doctrine commonly propagated among Nigerian society, women are responsible for men's improper sexual thoughts. Ifemelu is reprimanded by her mother for accusing the church doctrine of hypocrisy. Ifemelu is reminded "You must refrain from your natural proclivity towards provocation" (*Am.* 63). Furthermore, as a teenager, Ifemelu is taught that a proper female should consider her voice and will. She should be quiet and domestic girl. In other words, Ifemelu has to conform to the stereotypical image of a female in patriarchal society.

On the other hand, Adichie is skillful at deconstructing the stereotypical image of the African female in African society. Obnize's mother is a positive example of feminists. A university professor, she fights for women's equality in Nigerian society. However, she is also a victim of patriarchal society. She is even slapped by another professor because she accuses him of abusing his authority and manipulating the school funds. The faculty students protest against such injustice arguing that she has been denied proper treatment because she is a widow. However, according to Obnize's mother, "she should not have been slapped because she is a full human being, not because she doesn't have a husband to speak for her" (*Am.* 71). Indeed, Obnize's mother is a model to emulate for Ifemelu. She even encourages Ifemelu to express her views openly even if they do not comply with the conservative Nigerian society. Through Obnize's mother, Adichie presents the image of a strong and independent woman who fights for the freedom of women in the African society like other white feminists in the West.

Ifemelu rejects the submissive female image represented by her mother. She chooses to adopt the independent and strong image represented by Obnize's mother. Obnize describes Ifemelu as "the kind of woman who would make a man uproot his life" (*Am.* 39). His friends even warn him against dating Ifemelu for she "is a fine babe but she is too much trouble. She can argue. She can talk. She never agrees" (*Am.* 73). Such qualities are completely expected to shock not only the African but also the White readers who are accustomed to see the stereotypical image of the African woman as submissive, non-aggressive, docile and mother loving.

Though "raised well, fed and watered, but mired in dissatisfaction," both Obnize and Ifemelu decide to migrate to the west. They do not suffer from political injustice or even economic problems, war or starvation. Rather, they decide to migrate to escape from the "oppressive lethargy of choicelessness," (*Am.* 276) in order to fulfill their dreams in the West. The novel depicts their journeys and experiences as immigrants, their attempts to assimilate the norms of British and American societies, their identity crisis as a result of suffering from double / triple consciousness, the effect of the intersection of gender, race and class on their identity formation and their final decision to return to their native country which marks the completion of their learning process or "bildung."

Unlike conventional migration stories, Adichie's *Americanah* presents new types of migrants who are well educated and, to use Obnize's own words, "merely

hungry for choice and certainty" (*Am.* 29). Obnize, for example, felt unmotivated in his native country. His life is meaningless. His time is mostly spent in the following way:

seeking out magazines and books and films and second-hand stories about America, his longing took on a mirror mystical quality and America became where he was destined to be. He saw himself walking the streets of Harlem, discussing the merits of Mark Twain with his American friends gazing at Mount Rushmore. Days after he graduated from university, bloated with knowledge about America. (*Am.* 233)

Obnize is obsessed with his dream to go to America. He has read about American presidents, literature, life, and films since his early days at school. He longs to be a part of the American life and society. Failing to find a better job in Nigeria, Obnize decides to go to America to fulfil his dream. Unfortunately, he is denied a visa to the U.S.A. because of the 9/11 events. Being a university professor, Obnize's mother helps him go to England instead, she writes his name on one of her papers as a research assistant to grant him a student visa and takes him with her to England. Going to England, Obnize meets his cousin Nicholas who advises him to work:

If you come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work" [...] "the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life will begin. (*Am.* 239)

Obnize's expectations are denied by his inability to go to America and later by being forced to do menial jobs in England such as cleaning toilets to pay for his planned green card. He uses fake ID and attempts to marry in order to gain a legal citizenship of the European union. The process of arranging the false marriage is made by fellow Angolans who take Obnize's money and passport in order to force him to follow their instructions. Moreover, "It was they who provided water and gas bills, going back six months, with his name and a New Castle address, they found a man who could arrange these documents and a driving license" (*Am.* 283). Unfortunately, Obnize is arrested during registration. He realizes that even if he appeals to prove that his marriage is real this will not change his life.

Obnize's experience in Britain is a typical representation of the black immigrant's suffering in Western world. His "Diaspora" is best described in

Fanon's terms, in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, the "White world, the only honourable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a Black man. I was told to stay within bounds" (114-5). Obnize was expected to behave according to the expectations of the white man not according to the common human code of ethics. He is forced to perceive himself through the eyes of others; hence, his experience of double consciousness.

Masculinity is thus determined in terms of whiteness. Obnize realizes that, in Britain, he is performing menial jobs that have been exclusively limited to women in Nigeria such as "cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail" (*Am.* 292). During a dinner party in London, he expresses his limited male mentality. Describing his cousin Nicholas and his wife, Ojiugo, he wonders: "was it a quality inherent in women, or did they learn to shield their personal regrets, to suspend their lives, subsume themselves in child care?" (*Am.* 301). He begins to question the binary nature of his African culture that would force a once energetic woman to comply with the societal expectations of a mother and a wife. He regrets his society's attempts to impede or hinder the development of women or deny their equality. It is obvious that once he is deprived of the societal power he is granted in his home country because of his "veil," skin colour, he begins to feel the suffering of others.

Obnize is further disappointed by the inability of his fellow Nigerians to help him in London for they themselves have failed to adapt to their new community. They have lost their Nigerian values and departed from African culture and norms: "He knew the many stories of friends and relatives who, in their harsh glare of life abroad, became unreliable, even hostile versions their selves" (*Am.* 249). Such feelings reflect a severe crisis of double consciousness. Sackeyfio argues that:

Obnize's experience with double consciousness takes on concrete dimensions when he actually assumes a false identity as a route to legal employment. In this context, it has a different meaning from the original Duboisian framework of racial dynamics in America in the twentieth century. His false existence is abruptly shattered when he is caught just before the marriage, carted off to prison and deported, handcuffed, back to Nigeria. (223)

Indeed, the failure of Obnize's attempt marriage arrest and deportation marks the peak of his humiliation and dehumanization. When the lawyer asks him if he

wants to be "Removed, that word makes Obnize feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing" (*Am.* 279).

Obnize's experience in Britain reflects that of any immigrant who lives in exile, as illuminated by Shukla and Shukla. It is an experience that is characterized by alienation, nostalgia, loss, guilt and daydreaming, in addition to uprooting and marginalization (110). He is even forced to answer the name "Vincent Obi" to avoid being deported. His psychological trauma is described by Adichie in *Americanah*: "He thought of his mother and of Ifemelu, and the life he had imagined for himself, and the life he now had a lacquered as it was by work and reading, by panic and hope. He had never felt so lonely" (259). His experience of social injustice, humiliation and dehumanization is mainly caused by race. He is regarded as a lower class man because he is black. Furthermore, he is treated as a criminal; therefore, deported to Lagos handcuffed.

Unlike conventional "bildungsroman," in which the White struggles to integrate into his society, *Americanah* presents the story of Obnize, and later Ifemelu, who try to integrate and assimilate into the White society but end with complete failure in Obnize's case. Unlike conventional migration stories, Obnize's shows the deported migrant prospering in his own homeland. The West is no longer the Promised Land or utopia of imagination. Obnize who failed to accommodate and assimilate White norms or prosper in England has successfully integrated in his home country. He becomes the "Big Man" and rises as a wealthy, influential member of Nigerian society once he is home. Furthermore, he is absorbed in the Nigerian patriarchal culture. His marriage, described as a "second skin that had never quite fitted him snugly" (*Am.* 456), reflects his successful integration into his native community. He is happy to restore his lost privileges: gender and class. His wife, Kosi, is the typical submissive African wife who even apologizes for giving birth to a girl not a boy (*Am.* 458). She even submits to his will to marry Ifemelu. Indeed, Obnize's decision to marry Ifemelu and restore their past love relationship is the final stage in his self-learning journey. He decides to sacrifice his family and his successful career for the sake of his love, which marks the culmination of his "*bildung*" process of identity formation.

Ifemelu's experience in America and back to Nigeria represents a more intensified metaphor of the black immigrant experience of double/triple consciousness. It is also different in the fact that Ifemelu has to fight not only against her race or class but also against the injustices done to her because she is

simply a black woman. In fact, *Americanah* could be considered an example of black women literature which provides, to use Collins' words, a

comprehensive view of Black women's struggles to form positive self-definitions in the face of derogated images of Black womanhood. Portraying the range of ways that African– American women experience internalized oppression has been a prominent theme in Black women's writing. (*Black Feminist Thought* 93)

In addition, the novel displays Ifemelu's process of Americanization as an important phase of her “*bildung*.” In America, Ifemelu realizes the difficulties of being not only a black, but also a black woman in white society. The fact that she is to be discriminated because of her race is her first shock: “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only become black when I came to America” (*Am.* 290). Race is not an issue in African countries. However, it is the basis upon which Non-American blacks are judged in America. Living in the United States, Ifemelu comes to the conclusion that “race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is abused because it is about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It is about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair” (*Am.* 337). Ifemelu has to fight against racial prejudice, in addition to gender discrimination and class, which creates the dilemma of triple consciousness.

The novel displays several examples of double / triple consciousness experience which affect the learning process of Ifemelu. In her early life in America, for example, Ifemelu communicates with several African students at the college who embody Du Bois' duality. Describing how they adopt the other's contempt for them, Ifemelu says:

They mimicked what Americans told them: you speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa ... And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was mockery, born of longing, and of the heart broken desire to see a place made whole again. Here, Ifemelu felt a gentle sense of renewal. Here she did not have to explain herself. (*Am.* 139)

In reaching out a distinctive voice for herself, Ifemelu has been affected by the experience of other African women who immigrated to America and have

adopted several strategies to integrate into the white patriarchal society. For example, both Giniki, Ifemelu's friend, and Uju, her aunt, have been influenced, like most African women, by American ideals of beauty. They choose to adopt the American lifestyle as propagated through the media. bell hooks, the famous feminist, argues that "most media contribute to the institutionalization of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitations, and overall domination of all black people" (*Black Looks* 2).

One of the major images often advocated by the American mass media is that of the white woman as a symbol of beauty, purity and perfection. The black woman is often contrasted with the white one. Frizzy hair and dark skin color are often judged as inferior to fair white skin color or straight, long, blond hair or blue eyes. Therefore, black women are subject to social and psychological oppression because they are denied the American standards of beauty which hinder their social enhancement and affect their self-esteem. The inability to live up to the American ideals of beauty also result in a severe crisis of triple consciousness as a result of "always looking at one self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's some by the tape of a world that looks on in a mused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 364). They feel contempt at their own blackness and pity themselves for their inferiority. They are caught between what Collins describes as "the binary thinking that underpins intersecting oppressions, blue-eyed, blond thin White women could not be considered beautiful without the Other-Black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky heir" (89).

The experience of both Ginika and Aunt Uju deeply affect Ifemelu's consideration of the American standards / norms. Ginika, Ifemelu's friend, was often admired in Nigeria for her "caramel skin and waving hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro- like" (*Am.* 55-56). Moving to America, Ginika is completely changed. She is very thin. Once Ifemelu sees Ginika, she wonders "When did you stop eating and start looking like a dried stockfish?" (*Am.*122). In order to comply with the American beauty standards, Ginika keeps her weight loss. She tells Ifemelu that weight loss is praised in the U.S., unlike Nigeria. Ifemelu realizes that "there were codes Ginika knew, ways of being that she had mastered. Unlike Aunt Uju, Ginika has come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth, the cultural cues – had seeped into her skin" (*Am.* 125).

Having a light skin is another ideal of beauty in the US. Uju, Ifemelu's aunt, usually "avoid[s] the sun and use[s] creams in elegant bottles, so that her complexion, already naturally light, became lighter, brighter and took on a sheen" (*Am.* 74). In fact, Aunt Uju's experience in both Nigeria and America exemplifies the intersecting effects of various means of oppressions on African women. As a young teenager in Nigeria, Uju was brought up in her uncle's house to have a better opportunity of education which was lacking in her rural community. However, her relationship with the General crushed her strong will and independence. She yields to the submissive wife image expected of all African women. She has to comply with his ideas. Ifemelu recalls "Aunty Uju would laugh, suddenly girlish and compliant" (*Am.* 80). Uju's relationship with the General deprives her of her individuality. Uju's humiliation continues after the General's death. She is forced to leave Nigeria.

Moving to America, a single mother with a son, Uju is forced to work hard to sustain her family. It was expected that Uju's new experience in America, her economic independence, would have helped her regain her former self. However, she goes through a severe crisis of triple consciousness that left her with a split identity. Social, gender and racial forces subdue her individuality. Because of her black skin, she is mistreated by others: "When in public, her skin's pigment leads to her being treated in such a way that. Aunty Uju purposely adopts the accent of an immigrant to signal to others that she is not African American, but she still cannot avoid people's initial reactions to her physical appearance." (*Am.* 133)

In order to survive in the new community, Aunt Uju has to adopt the American norms and lifestyle. Commenting on her Aunt's assimilation process, Ifemelu notices that "her skin dry, her eyes shadowed, her spirit bleached of colour. She seemed to be staring at, rather than reading, the book" (*Am.* 108). Sackeyfio argues that "this description suggests the negation of her Nigerian identity, blotted by the demand to adapt and her need for acceptance and approval in the alien environment of America" (219). Moreover, Uju forbids her son, Dike, to speak Igbo. She tells Ifemelu, "please don't speak Igbo to him. Two languages will confuse him" (*Am.* 110). Much to Ifemelu's surprise, Ifemelu reminds her aunt: "what are you talking about Aunty? We spoke two languages growing up." Uju replies: "this is America. It's different" (*Am.* 110). Uju teaches Ifemelu how to live in America: "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional ... I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what

you have to do if you want to succeed" (*Am.* 119). Ifemelu comments on her Aunt's experience saying: "Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place" (*Am.* 119).

Though she was a successful doctor in Nigeria, Aunt Uju is unable to practice medicine in America because she is black. Therefore, she is forced to work three-part time job and enrolls in a medical school. Failing to perform her identity as a respected doctor has greatly affected Uju's self-esteem. She is forced to pass a medical exam which she has already taken several times in Nigeria because her Nigerian medical certificate is not approved by the Americans. She expresses her frustration for failing to pass the exam saying: "I've never failed an exam in my life. But they weren't testing actual knowledge, they were testing our ability to answer tricky multiple choice questions that have nothing to do with real medical knowledge" (*Am.* 109). Uju's failure to conform to her ideal of self-esteem makes her ashamed of herself. She discards not only her black identity but also her name. She pronounces her name differently: she pronounces it "y pujoo" instead of "oo-joo." She tells Ifemelu "It's what they call me." This is how she is perceived by the Other.

Aunty Uju's relationship with Bartholomew is a further example of the intersection of gender, race and class. For example, once Bartholomew is invited to dinner, Aunty Uju steps into performing the gender role expected of her. So, she "had slipped into the rituals, smiling a smile that promised to be demure to him but not to the world, lunging to pick up his fork when it slipped from his hand, serving him more beer" (*Am.* 116). Her marriage to Bartholomew is a great mistake. She realizes that she has replaced the General with Bartholomew: "Aunty Uju nodded while he talked, agreeing with everything he said" (*Am.* 116). He is a stereotypical male who "just sits in the living room and turns on the TV and asks me what we are eating for dinner" (*Am.* 217). Moreover, Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu that he wants to take her salary: "He said that it is how marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money home to Brother without his permission" (*Am.* 217). Both Bartholomew and the General expect Uju to perform the submissive, compliant female role, an experience that shows how both the Nigerian and American societies are male – dominated.

The characters of both Ginika and Aunt Uju do not only represent good examples of the intersection of gender, race and class but also affect Ifemelu to a great extent. Like Uju, for example, Ifemelu is forced, by her poverty, to exploit herself sexually. Unable to find a proper job, Ifemelu works at a gas station where

she is told by her employer: "you can work for me in another way" (*Am.* 145). She accepts to be raped by the coach in order to have money - a humiliating experience for her:

She felt, again, that crushing desire to cry, and she took a deep breath, hoping it would pass. She wished she had told Ginika about the tennis coach, taken the train to Ginika's apartment on that day, but now it was too late, her self-loathing had hardened inside her. She would never be able to form the sentences to tell her story. (*Am.*158)

She hates herself. She even feels that she has betrayed herself (*Am.* 439).

In his article, "Postcolonial African Bildungsroman," Ogaga Okuyade argues that, unlike the conventional Bildungsroman, "the protagonist of the African brand though assimilates societal values at the beginning, (s) he eventually constructs an identity that runs counter to those prescribed values of society because they are crippling" (9). Indeed, black women are crippled by various norms, forces and values that undermine their individuality and render them invisible, voiceless subjects. Moreover, according to Kilomba, "Within racism we thus become incomplete subjects" (Kilomba 45). bell hooks illuminates the nature of the dilemma of being "incomplete subject" saying: "As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject" (*Talking Back!* 42-43). The process of becoming a subject, according to hooks, is always accompanied by "coming to voice" (12). Furthermore, "speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects we can speak. As objects, we remain voiceless – our being defined and interpreted by others" (hooks 12).

In addition, it is through understanding the various forms of domination which affect one's life that: "one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, one invents new, alternative habits of being and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined" (hooks 15). Indeed, the process of becoming a subject who has developed critical thinking and overcome double / triple consciousness marks the learning journey of Ifemelu. Collins adds that "the process of becoming a subject is determined by active involvement with various forms of oppression" (*Black Sexual Politics* 5). Collins explains such process saying: "[I]n this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality and class" (*Black Feminist Thought* 125).

Ifemelu's first encounter with racial discrimination in America is when she goes to the international students' office to enroll in university. The white woman official thinks that Ifemelu cannot speak English because she is black. So, she addresses Ifemelu in a very slow-spoken English "I. Need, You. To fill out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These – Out?" (*Am.* 133). Thinking the white woman official has certain difficulty at speaking, Ifemelu asserts her that she speaks English well. However, Christine, the official, replies "I bet you do", "I just don't know how well". The narrator describes Ifemelu's shock at this moment:

Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Christina Tomas' before she took the forms, she shrunk. She shrunk like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent. (*Am.* 133-134)

Consequently, the first practice of assimilating American norms is mastering American accent. Ifemelu succeeds in adopting an accent that made her "sound totally American" (*Am.*175). Ifemelu manages to overcome one of the crippling forces that threaten her existence in America, by adopting what Fanon and Collins describe as the "mask of behavioral conformity" (*Black Feminist Thought* 107). It is the same mask which forces her to realize years later that though she manages to break social alienation in white America, she has been alienated from her true self. Speaking with a call center, she thanks the employee for assuming that she is a true American because of her new accent:

Only after she hung up she begins to feel the stain of burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words "you sound American," into a garland that she hung around her neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? She has won; Christina Tomas, pallied-face Christina Tomas under whose gaze she has shrunk like a small, defeated animal, would speak to her normally now. She has won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left its wake a vast echoing space, because she has taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers. (*Am.* 175)

For the first time, Ifemelu realizes that she has not come to America to become an American woman. Rather, she came to America to pursue her dreams

and fulfill her expectations. Adopting the American life style and norms has not been her ultimate goal. However, she is forced to do this out of her feelings of inferiority and dehumanization because of her black skin. Therefore, she is full of shame for disregarding her African roots. Her shock and shame increase when she realizes that she has not only changed "a pitch of voice" but her true nature as well, her "way of being" (*Am.* 173). It is at this moment of self-recognition that she decides to speak Nigerian again for "[t] his was truly her" (*Am* 175). She remembers this moment as "the day that she returned her voice to herself" (*Am.* 180).

Analyzed in terms of Bhabha's concept of "mimicry," Ifemelu's adaptation of American norms and values makes her "almost the same, but not quite"," almost the same, but not white" (Bhabha 86, 89). According to Bhabha, mimicry is a kind of resistance. Therefore, Ifemelu's mastering of American accent is a kind of a resisting form of mimicry, a camouflage practiced by the colonized to return the colonizer's gaze. In addition, seen in the light of Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" or black feminism's concept of "triple consciousness," Ifemelu's adoption of American norms reflects the split in her identity due to the negative effect of the intersection of various forms of oppression. She chooses to underestimate herself and accepts to be perceived through the eyes of others. In addition, her suffering can be interpreted in terms of Gooding-Williams as the experience of "conflictual two-ness", "the sort of two-ness that Du Bois has in mind when he speaks of "warring ideals" and "unreconciled strivings" (82), i.e., the conflict resulting from the clash between two sets of ideals: the Nigerian and the American.

Similarly, straightening her hair could be seen as an attempt to assimilate white culture, an attempt practiced by most immigrants in the white community, or successful adaption turned resistance through mimicry. Furthermore, it is a metaphor of the "triple consciousness" dilemma Ifemelu goes through. Besides, it is an example of assimilating American standards of beauty which leaves Ifemelu with a split individuality. It symbolizes the intersection of the various forms of oppression such as gender, race and class on Ifemelu. Due to poverty, Ifemelu is forced to seek for a proper job where she is advised, in the career service office of the university, to straighten her hair. Otherwise, she will fail the interview. Despite the fact that she used to mock her Aunty Uju for straightening her hair, Ifemelu now realizes that if she has to succeed and earn a living in the new community, she has to adopt the American norms of beauty. Therefore, she

decides to straighten her hair: "Aunty Uju had said something similar in the past, and she had laughed then. Now, she knew enough not to laugh" (*Am.* 202-203). However, though Ifemelu is praised for having "the white-girl swing" (*Am.* 203), she feels more self-alienation: "The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss" (*Am.* 203). According to Collins, "because hair is seen as a badge of beauty for women, this physical feature becomes more central in constructing hierarchies of femininity than is the case for men" (*Black Sexual Politics* 196), which reflects the feelings of loss and identity split which Ifemelu goes through. In depicting such feelings, Adichie condemns the oppression practiced on the black woman for racial, gender or class differences.

Indeed, Ifemelu's various attempts to assimilate American ideals of knowledge, beauty, etc., deprive her of her true identity and render her a distorted image of human being. She condemns the racial discrimination embodied in American standards of beauty. She tells her white friend, Curt, when he asks her why she straightened her "full and cool" hair:

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

Straightening her hair becomes a pre-requisite to succeed in white America. According to bell hooks, "the need to look as much like white people as possible, to look safe, is related to a desire to succeed in white world" ("Straightening Our Hair" 113). In other words, Ifemelu, like other immigrants, acquires a "duplicitous" form of hypocrisy, to use Kirkland's words, as a consequence of double/triple consciousness. According to Kirkland, such form of hypocrisy emerges when the black feels the need to "compromise one's ideals to maintain one's esteem... Being of two conflicting minds or being two-faced are the outcomes of the compromise to the hazards accompanying their aspirations for esteem" (145).

The development of Ifemelu's learning process and critical consciousness is clear once she realizes she has been self-alienated. When her hair falls out, she is advised by her friend, Wambui, to cut it short and "go natural" (*Am.* 208). Ifemelu finds herself "ugly" (*Am.* 208) with her new look. Her short hair makes

her look like a boy or an insect: "she was all big eyes and big head. At best, she looked like a boy; at worst, like an insect" (*Am.* 208). Her hair looks "like a mob of wool sitting on her head" (*Am.* 209). She even refuses to go to work. She tells Wambui: "I hate my hair. I couldn't go to work today" (*Am.* 205). Ifemelu realizes that adopting white norms would make her ugly; she is neither a black woman nor a white one; she becomes an "Other" to herself. Banks even associates long hair with femininity:

what is deemed desirable is measured against white standards of beauty, which include long and straight hair (usually blond), that is hair that is not kinky or happy. Consequently, a black woman's hair, in general, fits outside what is considered describable in mainstream society [...]. Even if hair is only one of many markers of femininity, or lack thereof, it is definitely one of the most powerful. (93)

Ifemelu's individuality is further undermined by her relationships with other men in America. Though Ifemelu realizes that Curt has given her "a sense of contentment, of ease" (*Am.*200), she thinks that "she has slipped out of her old skin" (*Am.* 200). She comments on her various affair with Curt, the white friend who is wealthy and kind to her, yet she realizes that "she had not entirely believed herself while with him- happy, handsome Curt, with his ability to twist life into the shapes he wanted. She loved him, and the spirited easy life he gave her, and yet she often fought the urge to create rough edges, to squash his sunniness, even if just a little" (*Am.* 287). For Curt, his family and his friends, Ifemelu is a "foreigner" (*Am.* 207), and "different" (*Am.*292). Though Ifemelu was a pretty girl, "She was not the kind of black that they could, with an effort, imagine him with: she was not light-skinned, she was not biracial" (*Am.*293). As for Curt's mother, his relationship with Ifemelu shows that America is "now colour-blind" (*Am.*293). Though they never talk about the issue of race, Ifemelu cannot ignore it. She was not herself. "It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else" (*Am.* 191). It is during her relationship with Curt that Ifemelu uses relaxers for her hair and removes her braids, which reflects the deep split in her identity, a fact that she realizes when she looks at her hair: "Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself" (*Am.*203). Years after breaking with Curt, Ifemelu tells a Frenchwoman at a dinner party 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 alie. 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.” (Am.290-91). She has to end her relationship with Curt once she realizes that she has not entirely believed herself while with him” (Am.287). Contemplating her life in the United States, Ifemelu realizes that there was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her: “A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself. The sense of something farther away, beyond her reach” (Am. 289-90).

Unlike Curt, Blain, Ifemelu's second friend, is an African American. Therefore, racial expectations are no longer a barrier. Moreover, being an African, like Ifemelu, makes her more comfortable. It is important that she met Blain after she decided to stop faking that she is an American: “The more they talk, the more she told herself that this was no coincidence; there was a significance to her meeting this man on the day that she returned her voice to herself” (Am.180). However, he insists on treating her as a submissive female who is expected to comply with his wishes and taste. For example, he rejects her reading choices. He thinks that she “with a little more time and a little more wisdom, would come to accept that the novels he likes were superior novels written by young and youngish men” (Am. 11). As a woman, Ifemelu is supposed to be less intelligent, less intellectual than Blain who is depicted as an example of the patriarchal Nigerian society she discards. It is remarkable that though living in America for a long time, Blain's masculine set of values never changes. As a man, Blain has been granted the right to undermine Ifemelu. She becomes an “Other” to him. Indeed, Ifemelu's relationship with Blain illuminates the intersection of racial and gender forces as major obstacles hindering female development. Katherine Hallemeirer analyzes Ifemelu's relationships with both Curt and Blain as “allegories for understanding the “question’ of race in the United States” (240). Unlike Curt, Blain perceives every event in terms of racism. Both Curt and Blain are, thus, seen as metaphor of contemporary America. Claims of equality and citizenship are illusions.

To restore her blackness, her sense of cultural belonging, Ifemelu joins the “Happily Kinky Nappy Com,” a “natural hair community” (Am. 212) of black women who are proud of their natural hair:

They complimented each other's photos and ended comments with 'hugs.'
They complained about black magazines never having natural-haired women in their pages, about drugstore products so poisoned by mineral oil that they

could not moisturize natural hair: they traded recipes. They sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, a wooly hair was normal. And Ifemelu fell into this world with a tumbling gratitude. (*Am.* 212)

The virtual world helps develop Ifemelu's critical consciousness over her triple consciousness and restores her self-appreciations. Her natural black hair becomes a metaphor of her restored black identity. Instead of feeling like an "insect," she feels in love with her hair: "[s]he looked in the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair" (*Am.* 213). Seen in feminist perspective, loving her hair/blackness is a kind of resistance of white dominance. bell hooks argues that: "Black folks who 'love blackness' [...] have decolonized our minds and broken with the kind of white supremacist thinking that suggests we are inferior, inadequate, marked by victimization" ("Loving Blackness as Political Resistance" 17).

Seen in terms of Bhabha's "mimicry" concept, Ifemelu manages to return the gaze at her colonizer, restore her cultural identity and satirize white standards of beauty. Acquiring "critical consciousness," Ifemelu unveils the negative effect of the media which shapes the minds of black women. When her aunt criticizes her natural black hair as "scuffy and untidy" (*Am.* 216), Ifemelu declares: "what if every magazine you opened and every film you watched had beautiful women with hair like jute? You could be admiring my hair now" (*Am.* 216). Undermining black standards of beauty versus white ones becomes a means of justifying subjugating black women. Ifemelu realizes the double standards of white magazines which claim that they address all women, "every woman" and give "universal" (*Am.* 295) make-up tips. In fact, they are addressing white women only. She tells Curt, her boyfriend: "This tells you, about different hair products for everyone-and 'everyone' means blonds, brunettes and redheads. I am none of those. And this tells you about the best conditioners – for straight, wavy and curly. Not kinky" (*Am.* 295).

Furthermore, Ifemelu decides to write a blog called "*Raceteenth or Curious Observations by-a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*" (*Am.* 296). The narrator illuminates her motivations for starting this blog: "[s]he longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others. How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America?" (*Am.* 296).

She decides to exchange views with her black fellows using her black accent. The blog, thus, becomes a symbol of the development of her “*bildung*” process, a symbol of acquiring her own voice. In addition, the blog can be described, to use Kilomba's words, as the space of "radical possibility... It is here that oppressive boundaries set by 'race,' gender, sexuality and class domination are questioned, challenged and deconstructed" (37).

In other words, the blog can be seen as a metaphor of the culmination of Ifemelu's “*bildung*” process. In addition, it enables Ifemelu to educate other black women on issues of race and gender. She becomes a "leading blogger about race" (*Am.* 305). She is even invited to talk about race in a company. In one of her talks, "How to talk about race with colleagues of other races" (*Am.* 304), she addresses a white audience. After the talking she received an e-mail in which she was accused of being a racist: "YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL LET YOU INTO THIS COUNTRY" (*Am.* 305. Capitalization in the original). Consequently, Ifemelu recognizes that she was not invited to "inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good about themselves. They did not want the content of her ideas; they merely wanted the gesture of her presence" (*Am.* 305), which means that racism is inherent in white America despite claims of freedom or equality. As a result, Ifemelu expresses her views in her own blog: “During her talks, she said: 'America has made great progress for which we should be very proud, where as in her blog she states that "Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it" (*Am.* 305, Italics in original).

Moreover, writing the blog helps Ifemelu restore her cultural roots, not only her voice or identity. Therefore, she decides to return home: “Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil” (*Am.* 6). She resigns from the boring women magazine she works at and decides to open a new blog which deals with everyday life in Lagos. It is remarkable that Ifemelu's decisions to write a blog and later go back home reflect her development and independence of mind. Back in Nigeria, Ifemelu is a different person. Now she could recognize clearly the forms of domination at work in society.

Unlike conventional “*bildungsroman*,” Ifemelu's story does not conclude with her success, integration in the white community or assimilating white values. Rather, Ifemelu's learning process ends with her adopting critical consciousness which enables her to discard white norms, restore her true identity and fulfill her integration within her black community in Nigeria. Ifemelu's decision to go back

home, furthermore, deconstructs the great ideas of the "American Dream" which promises wealth and success for immigrants of all races. Equality, freedom and brotherhood turn out to be mere façade or empty slogans which hide the hateful racism in white America. Real self-esteem and success, Adichie processes, can only be fulfilled at home. Ifemelu even discards her American accent in favor of her black one:

Ifemelu decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July [...]. It was convincing, the accent she had perfected, from carefully watching of friends and new casters the blurring of the t, the creamy roll of the r, the sentences starting with "so," and the sliding response of "Oh really," but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. (*Am.* 173)

She has willingly decided to give up her new-born American identity and all its attributes, "the kind of American English [...] that made race pollsters on the telephone assume that you were white and educated" (*Am.* 177).

Ifemelu's decision to go back home is an important step towards her coming of age experience. Androne argues that: "Rather than growing through overcoming barriers, the pattern of many bildungsroman, Ifemelu advances through her recognition that staying where she is will stunt her growth and force her to accept a place in a world which is increasingly alien" (230). Ifemelu has acquired a third form of double consciousness which Kirkland describes as "dyadic" that: "would reflect, via education, the result of an individual coming to a true, non-estranged comprehension of the position s/he deserves in comparison to others as both a citizen and a person of color with certain talents and competences" (142).

Furthermore, the development of Ifemelu's critical consciousness can be also interpreted as a result of acquiring a "second sight" according to which Henry implies "a very special access and insight in to the dehumanizing will to power of the European imperial subject" (91). The "potentiated second sight," Henry adds, happens when the African is able to overcome the "black face" stereotype imposed on his / her consciousness and perceive him/herself as "an African" by working out" within the creative code of African discourses and symbols" (91).

By doing so, Adichie fulfills her goal. She has stated in several interviews that *Americanah* is "a book about longing for home and what home means" (Barber). Nigeria has become the place where she belongs to Indeed, for both Obnize and Ifemelu, Nigeria becomes the place where" [they] are welcome, where

[they] can be with people [they] may regard very much like themselves, where [they] are not at sea but have found harbor" (McLeod 242).

Acquiring critical consciousness, both Obinize and Ifemelu see Nigeria from a different perspective. Obinize, for example, criticizes his fellow Nigerians for adopting material values. Similarly, Ifemelu, in her new blog, "The Small Redemption of Lagos," criticizes the postcolonial changes that took place in her native country and how they affect her people. Furthermore, she is able to make a comparison between America and Nigeria:

Lagos has never been, never will be, and has never aspired to be like New York, or anywhere else for that matter. Lagos has always been and is put by itself ... Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich eating people ... Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken, and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of eye here is just that, assorted. (*Am.* 421)

It is remarkable that Ifemelu manages not only to reconstruct a new image of herself as a black feminist, but also to consider her country and native people from a different perspective. The novel, thus, can be considered a celebration of black identity and culture. It confirms the development and success of a black woman not only in a white community but also in her native country. In addition, she resumes her relationship with her true love, i.e., Obinize, who grants her both love and safety (*Am.* 449).

A study of Adichie's *Americanah* shows the ability of black male/female to overcome double/triple consciousness and to develop a critical consciousness in the West once s/he has self-confidence, self-knowledge and proper education which enable him/her to rise above racial discrimination or the obstacles set by gender, class or poverty, in one's native country. Furthermore, the novel establishes important concepts. For example, one's true success can be made in one's own country. In addition, the novel deconstructs several misconceptions that have been propagated throughout the Western media such as the inferiority of black people, the illusion of the American dream, the racial prejudice often implied in the mass media, the wrong norms of beauty, and the negative images often associated with the African woman.

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الوعي المزدوج / الثلاثي في رواية أمريكانا للكاتبة اديتشي: قراءة نسوية سوداء

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المستخلص

يعود مصطلح "الوعي المزدوج" الى ديليو. دو بويس في كتابه الشهير *ارواح السود* الذي لخص فيه معضلة الأمريكيين السود في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية و سلط الضوء على حقيقة أن السود يُنظر إليهم بشكل أساسي وراء "الحجاب" ، أي أن بشرتهم / عرقهم يحدد علاقتهم مع الأمريكيين البيض. ومع ذلك ، فقد تم انتقاد مفهوم "الوعي المزدوج" لأنه فشل في تمثيل تعقيدات تجربة المرأة السوداء. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، تمت إعادة النظر في مفهوم دو بوا عن "الوعي المزدوج" من قبل النسويات السود اللواتي يدمجن الجنس والعرق في معضلة "الوعي المزدوج". بهذه الطريقة ، ظهر مصطلح "الوعي الثلاثي" من مفهوم دو بويس لشرح كيف يؤثر الجنس والطبقة والعرق على النساء السود ويدمر فرديتهن. وتهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى بيان كيف تصور الكاتبة النيجيرية اديتشي في روايتها *أمريكانا* (2013) الاضطهاد الذي تتعرض له على النساء الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي نتيجة تداخل عوامل الفقر والعرق والجنس عليهم. كما تهدف الورقة البحثية أيضاً إلى إظهار كيف تمكنت اديتشي من دمج قضايا مهمة في روايتها مثل عملية تشكيل الهوية التي تشير إلى بلوغ الأبطال سن الرشد والوعي المزدوج / الثلاثي الذي يمر به كل من الذكور والإناث من السود / الأفرو-أمريكيين نتيجة لتجربة المعاناة بسبب التحيز العنصري والاجتماعي والجنسي الذي يتعرضون له. أن الرواية تصور كيف يشكل العرق والجنس عقلية البيض وكيف يدمرون الأفرو أمريكيين بسبب "حجابهم" ، أي لون بشرتهم وكيف تثبت تجربة الافارقة الامريكان في الغرب أن الغرب مازال متأثراً بالمفاهيم الاستعمارية القديمة التي تحكم على الناس على أساس العرق أو الجنس أو الطبقة وهو ما يعد احد الاهداف الرئيسية لهذه الورقة البحثية. كما سيتم إلقاء الضوء على عملية تشكيل الهوية التي تمر بها الشخصيات الرئيسية من خلال شكل "تشكيل الهوية" الذي يختلف عن الشكل "التقليدي". كما تعرض الرواية عدة أمثلة لتجربة الوعي المزدوج / الثلاثي التي تؤثر على عملية التعلم للبطلة والتي سيتم فحصها في هذه الورقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوعي المزدوج / الثلاثي ، النسوية السوداء ، "تشكيل الهوية" ، اديتشي ، *أمريكانا*