

To my beloved mother

To my sister, her husband and children

To my dear husband

To all my friends especially Katia, Tassadit, Zina

Romaissa

To my parents

To my sisters

To all my friends

Naziha

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Abstract

*This dissertation is a comparative study between Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The aim of this research is to show the effects of migration on Black African immigrants and to shed light on the racism faced by the blacks in the host land, besides to how their identity construction is affected by stereotypes and social structures, focusing on the two protagonists Sissie and Ifemelu and other secondary characters. To reach our purpose, we have relied on Stuart Hall, Frantz Fanon and Kobena Mercer theories of identity and racism. At first, we have explored the issue of identity crisis in America and Europe through *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Americanah*. We have focused on Sissie and Ifemelu's identity struggles and their suffering from being black in a white society. Similarly, in the second chapter we studied the black African immigrants' experience of racism in Europe and America through *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and *Americanah* as the first obstacle that Sissie and Ifemelu have to face in constructing their identity. Thus, after studying the two selected novels we have come to conclusion even though Aidoo and Adichie belongs to two different African countries and generations, they share common attitudes toward racism and identity construction.*

Key Words: *Racism, hair, skin color, diasporas, identity formation*

I. Introduction

Diaspora Literature are those narratives that explores the hard journey of people who migrate from their motherland to the host land. In fact, diaspora refers to exile from the geographical, psychological and cultural sense. In recent decades, African diaspora do voluntary migration to improve their lives and have better opportunities.

African literature has imposed itself on the world literary scene, through its production of real literature of the issues of the Africans, stating their suffering, concerns and interests. In recent years, African diaspora becomes worldwide interests especially with the emergence of the African female diaspora that depicts the harsh reality of living in a white society and the suffering of the black Africans more specifically black women from the female perspective.

In the 21 century, racial discrimination still a huge issue in the white societies and became more relevant than ever. In fact, black people today are murdered due to their different skin color, this show that America and other European countries are still stuck in their past racist mind behavior. However, racism has its impacts when it encounter with identity construction when living in the Diaspora.

Racism and identity are complex topics that have been studied extensively in the social sciences. Racism is a form of prejudices and discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, while identity is an individual's sense of self and how they view themselves in relation to the world around them. Racism can have a profound impact on an individual's identity, as it can lead to feelings of alienation, marginalization, and even oppression. It is important to recognize the ways in which racism can shape an individual's identity and to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

In this context, Aidoo and Adichie belong to African literature and their works aspire to explore and understand the values, preoccupations and desires of their societies. However, our research will mainly be concerned with identity and racism issues and examines the experience of Black Africans within two different Western countries. Both these works seem to contain most of the identity malaise and racial discrimination that constitute the main target of our study. From this, we think it is important to analyze Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).

The two novels also belong to the Diaspora literature; that is why the exploration of issues like racism and identity seem to be important and appropriate to the aim of this research. In this context, we are dealing with two major African diaspora female writers Ama Ata Aidoo, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who received a great deal of critical attention.

II. The Literary Review

Our Sister Killjoy by Ama Ata Aidoo was first published in 1977, when the book was first published, most reviews were highly positive and the work was considered ‘witty and experimental’¹. The novel was written partially in the United States which may reflect Aidoo's own travels abroad. The novel discusses many themes including Black Diaspora, Colonialism, Racism, Exile, Identity Crisis, Colonial Education, and Colonization of the Mind.

In his dissertation, *Crossing Borders and the Search for an African Selfhood: A Postcolonial Study of Ayi Kwei Armah’s Why Are You so Blest? And Ama Ata Aidoo’s Our Sister Killjoy*, Aissaoui Mustafa asserts that “After a long struggle, African nation-states eventually gained their independence but the ramifications of colonialism were so profound that these nations are still suffering from its effects: geopolitical fractures, cultural confusion, and serious identity crisis”². It is a war against the ideas that are implanted in the minds of black Africans as they believe that living in the West will provide them better opportunities and escape from their social restrictions. Aidoo, use Sissie as the eye of its people to criticize those immigrants living in Europe.

Some other studies focused on the life of African self-exiles in Europe, as we can see in Wilentz's paper, "The Politics of Exile: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*" (1991) examines Aidoo’s challenge with exile and her questioning about the superiority of the European cultures. In Cheryl Sterling’s paper entitled, “Can You Really See through a Squint? Theoretical Underpinnings in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* " (2010), the novel is read as a counter-discourse to the colonial travel narrative that glorify white people and make it a dominant force over black race, as the character of Sissie insists on changing the Western mentality and theory and shows the true face of Europe, depicting the role of African women in the development of their country.

In the paper *Counter-Discursive Strategies in Postcolonial African Novel: Revising the Peripheries in Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy*, studies the racial stereotype image of the Africans as inferior and highlight the role of the novel as counter discourse to the colonial narratives. Aidoo, adopts a counter discourse to assert the invalidity of colonial discourse in order to eliminate the negative image of African people.

Literary critics have generally praised *Our Sister Killjoy* as a groundbreaking and insightful work. It has been lauded for its powerful exploration of a minority experience, and its ability to capture feeling and thought through simple prose. The characterization and dialogue have also been applauded, particularly for their strong African flavor. Additionally, scholars have appreciated the novel's sharp wit and subtle but pertinent commentary on racial issue.

Like Aidoo, Adichie's novel *Americanah* was well received after its release by both critics and audiences and it was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award in March, 2014, and shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for fiction in the same year³.

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a critically acclaimed novel that follows the story of two Nigerian immigrants, Ifemelu and Obinze, as they grapple with the complexities of race, identity, and immigration in the U.S. and their homeland. Critics have praised the book for its poignancy, attention to detail, and exploration of the immigrant experience. Most reviews note the sharp, insightful writing, which captures the nuances of family dynamics, cultural identities, and the search for home. Many reviewers applaud the way *Americanah* casts a light on the struggles faced by immigrants in the U.S., tackling issues such as racism, intersectionality, and Identity crisis.

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been widely praised by literary critics and readers alike. The New York Times named it one of the 10 Best Books of 2013, and praised Adichie's "*alert humor and a finely detailed eye for character and cultural interaction.*"⁴

Similarly, The Washington Post described it as “a smart, funny and profoundly moving book about race and assimilation, love and displacement⁵.” The Guardian called it “an exquisite gem of a book⁶.” And National Public Radio said, “It’s not only an exquisitely plotted story; it’s also a brilliant study of identity, of what it means to be African, American, Nigerian, British, a person of color, a man, a woman, old, young.⁷”

In his text “Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile, and Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*,” Nwanyanwu discusses the novel’s theme of migration and exile, as well as the consequences of migration on the migrants’ lives and identities. Moreover, he presents *Americanah*’s discourse of otherness, and how otherness and migration can be understood through the lens of transculturalism. Nwanyanwu argues that migration involves “a transcultural move between a periphery and a dominant metropolitan center in which the migrant must struggle through new marginalization”⁸. In other words, moving from an African country to a western one means redefining one’s identity in accordance with the new social landscape as well as the geographical one. Migration can generate what Nwanyanwu calls “the traumatic experience of otherness”, an experience that *Americanah* explores. Hence, he argues, “the essence of being a migrant is to inhabit the social sphere of otherness, which [...] is synonymous with being black within American culture”⁹.

One more critical attention to Adichie’s novel is written by Dina Yerima who explores the redefinition of identity in the postcolonial women’s writings in her article “*Regimentation or Hybridity? Western Beauty Practices by Black Women in Adichie’s Americanah*.” Yerima discusses this question of identity-formation in *Americanah* with the help of Gayatri Spivak’s idea of the postcolonial woman as oppressed in double remarks, both as a postcolonial subject, based on race, and as a woman, based on gender. According to Yerima, “the postcolonial woman struggles with the process of building identity through self-expression. Self-expression is defined as demonstrating individual emotions, ideas, and personality. For the post-colonial

woman, self-expression relates to the constructs placed on her by modern society”¹⁰ She also draws on Andrea Dworkin’s idea of beauty standards, describing the relationship an individual has to their body, and states that “this idea shows how a woman’s development and achievements are closely linked to her beauty practices”¹¹.

From all that is said above, our review of the literature highlights some critiques of both novels that have made reference to the themes of race and identity though they did not deal in depth with them. It also appears from the review of literature and to our modest knowledge no research has involved the two novels.

III. Issue and Working Hypothesis

After observing that most of the studies made on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s and Ama Ata Aidoo’s works have provided us with glances of the quest for identity formation and the issue of racism, it is worth noting that both of these book’s authors are African female writers who share similar cultural values. Although the two writers' works were published in different languages and nations, they seem to share similar views and stance, particularly on the question of identity and racism. Our goal is to undertake a comparative analysis which will approach the issues of identity and racism, concentrating on the protagonist of the two novels Sissie and Ifemelu, who are the best example of blacks suffering from racism and identity uneasiness in America and Europe. In addition, this work will also deal with black women’s experiences of otherness on both a racial and gender level.

IV. Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, our dissertation has a general introduction in which we have provided a general overview of the topic, as well as the study's purpose, followed by some reviews written on Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*.

The second section is dedicated to the methods and materials through which we present Stuart Hall's theory of "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Frantz Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks" and Kobena Mercer's "Welcome to the Jungle: Black Hair/Style Politics" to support our work with a theoretical basis.

In the results section, we presented the results reached by our investigation on the subjects of identity and race in both narratives. Finally, the discussion section is divided into two chapters. The first chapter discusses the theme of identity in *Americanah* and *Our Sister Killjoy*; while, the second chapter attempts to study the theme of race in both works.

Endnotes:

¹ Ibraheem N.A. Tagaddeen, Aisha Al-Matari. *Counter-Discursive Strategies in Postcolonial African Novel: Revisiting the Peripheries in Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy* (2018), 11.

² Mustapha Aissaoui. *Crossing and the Search for an African Selfhood: A Postcolonial Study of Age Kwei Armah's why are we so blest? Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy*.

³ Alison, Flood. "Chimamanda-Ngozi-Adichie-Americanah-National-Book-Critics-Circle-Awards". 14, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com>

⁴ <https://time.com>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com>

⁷ <https://radio.wpsu.org>

⁸ Augustine Nwanyanwu, "Transculturalism, Otherness, Exile, and Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* in *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society* 49(2), (2017), 386.

⁹ *Ibid*, 399.

¹⁰ Dina Yerima, "Regimentation or Hybridity? Western Beauty Practices by Black Women in Adichie's *Americanah*." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 48, no. 7, Oct. (2017), 639.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 650.

V. Methods and Materials

A. Methods

1. Stuart Hall's Theory of *Identity and Diaspora*

In order to deal with the issue of identity in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), we have used the concept of 'Cultural Identity' discussed by Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) says that "*identity is not transparent or unproblematic as we think.*"¹

To start, Stuart Hall (1932-2014) is a central figure in the 'cultural studies'. In postcolonial context "*identities can be seen as ever changing phenomena and they are constantly shifting*"². Hall claims that "*identities are transparent and cause challenges for postcolonial subjects. Instead of viewing identity as a completed reality, one must consider it as a product that is never completed. In fact, identity can be seen as a product which is always in process*"³.

According to Stuart Hall, the concept of identity is structured in two forms called positions. "*The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common*"⁴. Hall points out the first position of cultural identity reflects shared historical traces and cultural experiences that give people a stable and continuous definition of themselves as members of the same race in a context of varied historical transitions. As for the second position, according to Stuart Hall, "*this is an identity understood as unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory which signifies an identity marked by multiple points of similarities as well as differences. This cultural identity refers to "what they really are", or rather "what they have become"*"⁵. This second definition, according to Hall, is superior to the first because it emphasizes that a person's identity should

not be based on past cultural events, but rather that everyone should have the freedom to discover their own identity, and he support the idea that “identity is fluid and under constant construction”⁶. Hall's second position is to acknowledge that there are some important differences beyond shared common ground, and that they come together to make up who they are today

Stuart Hall argued that cultural identity is not only a matter of “*being but of becoming*”⁷. According to him, identity is dependent rather than ahistorical or unchanging identity, it is both a process of "being" and a process of 'becoming'. It belongs to the future as well as to the past, depending on the pre-given and predetermined aspects only partially define identity, it transcends time and place. Despite being historical, it changes in and through power relations that are spatial and culture⁸.

More crucially, Stuart Hall defines identity as the act of recognizing that all identities are the same when we live in one group. However, the entire topic of identification has shown us that identity is always established through ambivalence. In addition, identity is formed through our social experiences.

Hall goes on to say that in post-modern society, the once-unique identities of the past are becoming fractured or incomplete, and are always under development, they are no longer made up of a single identity, but of numerous identities that can clash. Individualization, according to Hall, began when people were liberated from religious customs and systems.

According to Hall, in a post-modern society, there is no longer a single identity that can operate as a "master" identity over other dominant identities. In the past, everyone's class served as a master identity. Hall thinks that new social movements have aided in the formation of these new identities.

2. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), in order to understand the problem of racism perpetrated against black people due to their skin color. The title *Black Skin, White Masks* explores the psychological repercussions of racism and colonialism. It looks at how white civilization ruled over the black population and the effects of race on black Africans.

Throughout the book, Fanon discusses his encounters with racism in France in the 1950s as well as a variety of other themes that create barriers between blacks and whites, such as language barriers, race, independence, and other matters. The ideas presented can be related to the racism in America now even though the events of the book took place in the 1950s. It is a blend of psychoanalysis and personal experiences from the author's own life, while he was in France. He is interested in explaining the consequences of a group or an individual when they are separated from their culture. He claims that their culture has degraded in comparison to the better authoritarian culture. One of the most important arguments he raises is the significance of keeping one's native tongue. Adopting the oppressive culture's language entails adopting their culture as well as its biological aspects. *"To speak means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization."*⁹

The color of skin defines people's cultural identities, this sentence summarizes the central concept of Fanon's book; it explains how black individuals are viewed and culturally identified based on their skin tone. He argued that the white man in our world is putting a racial frame around black people only because they are colored.

The ambition of becoming white was a widespread idea among black and colored people, they believe the white sphere equated to a world of money, beauty, strength, and virtue, whereas the black sphere corresponded to a world of poverty, primitiveness, and worthlessness. According to Fanon, the only way for a Negro to escape the tragedy of being black was to integrate into the European social and cultural context.

3. Kobena Mercer's *Welcome to the Jungle: Black Hair/Style Politics*

Kobena Mercer *Black Hair/Style politic* (1994) examines how hair and particularly, Black hair have changed and transformed over the last few decades as a result of shifting values and cultural standards. Hair whether thick, thin, straight, curly, blonde, brown, kinky, or silly, according to Mercer, is "*never a straightforward biological fact*"¹⁰. In contrast to eye color and skin tone, hair is flexible and changeable, constantly being "*worked upon' by human hands*"¹¹. However, Mercer contends that hair alone does not have any real significance; it is how it is styled that gives it cultural ethical, and political meaning. Through specialized styling and chemical processing men and women have been able to alter their exterior look to fit what they think to be society's ideal concept of beauty. Ethnically, hair has become essential in determining or concealing one's race. Thus, hair serves as an 'ethnic signifier', or a defining element of one's ethnicity that is continually read, appraised, and frequently reinterpreted by dominating cultures in the surrounding world¹².

Mercer argues that black Africans in the West countries used their hair to oppose the prevalent social system. The Black community, for example, uses hairstyles that emphasizes and celebrates their natural hair, converting these cultural markers into physical qualities to be proud of, such as Afros and dreadlocks, he claims that the Afro was not indicative of natural Black hair since African American men and women actively decided to style their hair in that manner, consciously or unconsciously contributing to the social hierarchy¹³.

B. Materials

1. Ama Ata Aidoo's Biography

Ama Ata Aidoo is a Ghanaian author, poet, playwright, and educator. Born in 1942, she is the first female playwright from Ghana to publish in English, she is one of the most influential

African writers of her generation, having produced a significant body of work with themes focusing on feminism, the African experience, culture, and the struggles of post-colonial Africa.

Aidoo's writing draws heavily on her own experiences and those of her ancestors. Her debut novel, *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977), was a powerful critique of colonialism and gender oppression in post-colonial Africa. Her play *Anowa* (1970) was an exploration of the struggle between traditional African culture and modernity. Aidoo has also been a passionate advocate for women's rights and education. Her works reflect her commitment to women's emancipation and advancement in Ghana. She has also been a dedicated educator, teaching at universities in Africa, the United States, and Europe¹⁴.

Aidoo's works often focus on issues of gender inequality and highlight the oppression of women in African societies. She often portrays women as strong and independent, refusing to be defined by oppressive societal norms. In her novels, she sheds light on controversial topics such as sexuality, arranged marriages, religious beliefs, and traditional gender roles.

In addition to her novels and plays, Ama Aidoo has written poetry, short stories, and essays. Her poetry often expresses feelings of despair, pain, and love in a way that resonates with many readers. In her short stories, she provides a sharp critique of African patriarchy, while also celebrating traditional customs. Her essays are thought-provoking and encouraging, and they often challenge conventional views on feminist ideas.

Aidoo is an important figure in African literature, and her works continue to inspire readers around the world.

2. The summary of *Our Sister Killjoy*

Our Sister Killjoy or *Reflection from a Black-eyed-Squint* by the Ghanaian female novelist Ama Ata Aidoo, published in 1977 is about a young African woman called Sissie who travelled to Europe for better education.

The semi-autobiographical novel shows the negative effects of the colonialism on colonized people. The novel expresses the thoughts and experiences of Sissie as a black female who encounter for the first time with the West. It examines the ways in which racism affects Sissie's identity, her relationships and her sense of belonging. It also demonstrate the importance of embracing our multiple identities and the value of cultural hybridity. Aidoo's novel provides an important insight into the effects of racism and the need for greater understanding and acceptance of diversity.

The novel is presented in four sections. The first section is titled 'Into a bad dream' where Sissie arrives in Germany. The second section of the book, 'The Plums' tells the love relation between Sissie and a white German housewife called Marija Sommer. The third one is 'From Our Sister Killjoy' where Sissie traveled to London and encounters with other African descents and discovers their suffering. The last section is titled 'Love letter' written as a letter form between Sissie and her lover where she tries to convince him to return home in order to serve for the interest of his country.

3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Biography

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a renowned writer whose work is critically acclaimed throughout the world. Born in Nigeria, her works include novels, short stories and essays, which explore themes of identity, race, gender, history and contemporary society. Adichie's writing has been widely praised, earning her numerous awards, including the MacArthur Genius Grant, the National Book Critics Circle Award and an honorary degree from Johns Hopkins University.

Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2013), explores the lives of a Nigerian family living in a post-colonial setting. Through the eyes of its protagonist Kambili, Adichie illustrates the clash between Western and African cultures, as well as the tension between patriarchal and matriarchal values. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2014), Adichie provides a vivid description of the

Nigerian-Biafran War and its aftermath. The novel was awarded the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction and has been adapted into a film starring Chiwetel Ejiofor and Thandie Newton¹⁵.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian author and a frequent speaker on the subject of feminism. She has written numerous fiction and non-fiction works that have become successes, including the novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, as well as her acclaimed *TEDx talk, We Should All Be Feminists*. Adichie's works delve into themes such as identity and post-colonialism, while examining the complexities of race, gender, and class. Adichie's impact on literature and discourse on human rights and social justice has been widely celebrated by readers and critics alike. Her books and essays have won numerous awards and she has been featured in the press and interviewed by various news outlets. In 2015, she was listed in Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world¹⁶. Through her work, Adichie has made an invaluable contribution to the field of literature and has become an inspiration for women around the world to speak out and defend their rights.

Adichie's stories often feature strong female characters who strive to not only define their own identities but also shape how the world perceives them. These female protagonists often navigate both traditional and modern life while maintaining their sense of self and independence. In her essay *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie succinctly shares her thoughts on gender and feminist principles. Through her work, she has shown that all individuals — regardless of gender — should have an equal opportunity to live their best lives and pursue their dreams.

Adichie's body of work not only provides readers with a profound understanding of identity, feminism, and the modern world, but it also unwaveringly champions change and encourages readers to challenge those in power. With each book and essay she writes, Adichie further illuminates the human conditions.

4. Summary of *Americanah*

Americanah is Adichie's third novel published in 2013 a diasporic novel who depicts the lives of black African immigrants in United States. Ifemelu the protagonist of the novel is a young Nigerian woman who migrated to America to finish her degree where she encounters with race for the first time and faces all kind of discrimination. Thus, the novel focuses on several topics such as racism, identity formation, otherness, skin color, hair, etc.

Ifemelu experience in America enable her to understand what it means to be black in a racial society, this pushes her to create a blog called "Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" where she expresses her feelings about the racial reality and the challenges that African-Americans and non-American blacks in America.

Adichie explores the concept of identity in the context of race, class and gender. She examines how these identities shape the lives of her characters and how they are shaped by the society they live in.

Americanah, tries to reflect on the identity crisis of immigrants and the racial issues that still exist in twenty first century African American community and the impact that these have on the identity formation of non-white people.

VI. Results

Throughout our dissertation, we attempted to compare two novels written by two black female writers. One belongs to the old generation and the second to the new generation. The two novels are Ama Ata Aidoo's "*Our Sister Killjoy*" (1977) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "*Americanah*" (2013). Our comparison focuses on the themes of identity and racism experienced in two different white communities: the American and European one, by the blacks in general and black women in particular. To achieve our purpose we have relied on Stuart Hall's "*Cultural Identity and Diasporas*" (1996) to focus on how Native land identity and identity abroad are constructed, Frantz Fanon's "*Black Skin, White Masks*" (1952), and Kobena Mercer "*Welcome To The Jungle*" (1994) to show how differences at the level of race, color, language, and hair, are used by the whites to subject Black people.

The first section of the discussion has been devoted to the analysis of the theme of identity in both novels, relying on Stuart Hall's "*Cultural Identity and Diasporas*" which is going to help in analyzing Ifemelu and Sissie's relationship with the new Euro-American societies, and their struggle to maintain their true identity. The second section, has been devoted to discuss how the issue of racism is manifested in both novels relying on Frantz Fanon's "*Black Skin, White Masks*" and Kobena Mercer "*Welcome to the Jungle: Black Hair/Style Politics*" where we have explored the characters and their experiences.

After the discussion of the two sections of the present research paper, we have come to the findings that the main character's identity are formed through their social interaction with others, and that racism is a social and historical construct that exists thanks to the interaction between people belonging to different races, white and black, this opens the door to exploitation and denigration of black people, who are viewed as an impure and weak race by the white people who according to them represent power.

End Notes

¹ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.

² Ibid, 10.

³ Ibid, 222.

⁴ Ibid, 223.

⁵ Ibid, 225.

⁶ Ibid, 225.

⁷ Ibid, 112.

⁸ Hussey Ian, *Note ON STUART HALL'S CULTURAL IDENTITY AND DIASPORA*. New York University: Toronto. 2014.

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17.

¹⁰ Mercer Kobena, *Black hair/style politique*, 34.

¹¹ Ibid, 34.

¹² <https://fashpow2014.wordpress.com>

¹³ Ibid, 5

¹⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Ama Ata Aidoo." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 19, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ama-Ata-Aidoo>.

¹⁵ Tunca, Daria. African Presence in Europe, and Beyond. "Of French Fries and Cookies: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Diasporic Short Fiction." (2010): 291-309. Print

¹⁶ Ibid, 309.

VII. Discussion

A. Chapter One: Identity in *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Americanah*

1. Identity in *Our Sister Killjoy*

The issue of identity is an important theme throughout Ama Ata Aidoo's novel. The protagonist, Sissie, is a young Ghanaian girl who navigates her way through the complexities of her African and European heritage. She tries to find a way to balance both sides of her identity without being defined entirely by either of them. Through her journey, Sissie discovers that living between two cultures is not a weakness, but rather a strength, it gives the person the ability to be more mature and aware of the outside world.

1.1. The Rejection of the European Culture

Sissie, the protagonist of the novel takes a long journey to Europe in order to have better education, during her journey she encounter with cultural diversity but unlike the other Africans she is not fascinated by the European cultures. From the beginning of the novel she tries to resist against European stereotypes that attempts to misrepresent and tarnish African image, and reveals the harsh realities of the colonialist's philosophy. Throughout Sissie's voyage as a new black female encountering with the west, she is very confident of her identity and she do not try to please to white people, she is aware that she is an outsider and this fact does not bother her. For Hall there are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity':

The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence.¹

Once Sissie arrives in Germany she does not try to belong to the white society, rather she is confident of her African identity, she feels different and always asserts her identity through her reactions towards different situations, unlike Sammy her country man a minor character in the novel seems to lose his true African identity which can be seen in his behavior towards things, besides adopting a European life style and ideologies. For Hall, identity is both a process of 'becoming' and a process of 'being' which means that people change, identity change in spatial and cultural power relations. For him, cultural identity is an issue of depicting the position of the person who represents it is linked to the practice of representation. In historical and geographic spaces, the person's position evolves, affecting cultural identity paradigms in the process, identity is always changing. It is a continuous production process that is constituted through representation. He Writes:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation²

Sammy tries to convince Sissie that Europe is different from Africa and the life here is much better and easier. That can be seen in the following quote: *"going to Europe was altogether more like a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise."*³ So, we can understand that Sammy believes in the superiority of the West.

In the novel Sissie rejects all the European cultures and kills the joy to the other Africans who seem charmed by the European cultures and lose their own one. She always tries in her conferences to discuss and remind Africans of the suffering of their ancestors against the colonizers, she attempts to convince them to go back to their homeland in order to serve in the benefits of their countries and not forget their true identity. Even in the last

chapter, she appears as a killjoy when she send a letter for her lover who takes the decision to live in exile to persuade him and other Africans to come out of their delusions and force them to knowledge their obligation toward their mother land.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo mentions the struggles of the African students specially the Ghanaian students who left their countries to travel across Europe seeking for better opportunities and brilliant future. Aidoo, shows how these students are trying to belong to the white society and forget about their true-self, she express her anger through her protagonist Sissie who became a killjoy for those students.

In Europe, Sissie affirms her African identity, she never tries to hide her African side or tries to act like a white woman, on contrary, she all the time tries to be herself and she never hides the fact that she is unpleased by the European ideologies and life style. Sissie's ego and personality allow her to maintain her identity that under all the circumstances, she is successfully able to avoid being affected by the West.

Through Sissie's journey, Aidoo makes the reader understand that there are people like Sissie that are aware of the true reality of the West and there still Africans that did not forget about the painful past of their ancestors ; Aidoo assert her love to her country, culture and identity.

1.2. Moral Values and Loss of Self

Throughout the novel, Aidoo shed light on how most black Africans glorify the west and in order to integrate they can do anything beginning from losing their selves and neglecting their values. This demonstrate that the West has successfully affected the way of thinking of the Africans living there and causes what we call inferiority complex.

Black Africans are in a struggle with their identity crisis as a result of attempting to imitate Western culture and ideologies, as Hall states: "*from this I came to understand that*

identity is not a set of fixed attributed, the unchanging essence of the inner self, but a constantly shifting process of positioning”⁴

Throughout the relationship of Sissie and Marija a white German woman, Sissie rejects Marija’s seduction because she refuses to be what a white women wants her to be, Sissie’s ego avoid her to be dominated by a white person, on the other hand, she feels ashamed to have such a wrong relation because this sort of relationship in Africa are weird and shameful. Sissie wonders:

“ ... Do you go back to your village in Africa and say... what do

You say even from the beginning of your story that you met a

Married woman? No, it would not be easy to talk of this white

*Woman to just anyone at home... ”*⁵

Through what Aidoo makes Sissie hardly avoid in Europe asserts her respect for the social values of her country. Aidoo believes that black Africans who lives in Europe should preserve their identity and culture, she wants them to understand that person’s culture and identity defines who they are as individuals and the country they come from.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie discovers that having such a connection with Europe or any other place that is not home leads to a loss of self, culture and identity crises. Aidoo expresses her frustration poetically, she writes “Beautiful Blackbodies / changed into elephant-gray corpses, / littered all over the Western world”⁶, they struggle to become that the west deems desirable after losing their ‘Blackness’, Sissie assert that in doing so, they become lifeless; they become ghosts. Aidoo uses Sissie to speak about the decline of African ideals.

In the third chapter, Aidoo speaks about those Africans who when the return to their home country they pretend that they are living in heaven. Many characters in O.S.K are influenced by the European cultures, beliefs and ideologies. Sissie stands alone as the only

black that tries to be the eye of her country, while other Africans lose their values and their self in order to fit in the white society.

In the novel, Sissie portrays her frustration against her Ghanaian friend's lack of loyalty to their roots. Aidoo sheds light on her dissatisfaction with the displacement of social and cultural identity which she considers a huge issue in today's African immigrant's community. Sissie is aware that she lives in a world of deception, where people are able to play any role in order to achieve their goals.

When the characters experience a recurrent loss of foundation in reaction to global influence, *Our Sister Killjoy* illuminates doubt about the preservation of community. The inability of their societies to preserve the values they have established exposes a reflection on the nation's social well-being: why do these people experience such disillusionment and estrangement while the country is a political and economic success story? The rejection of their moral values by their companions shows that social norms are being eroded.

2. Identity in *Americanah*

Identity is a complex issue in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, particularly for the main character Ifemelu who struggles to define her identity in order to fit into the society she finds herself in. She faces the challenge of reconciling her Nigerian heritage with the demands of American culture. She often finds it difficult to fit into the American culture because it made her feel like an outsider. As a result, she must find ways to express her identity in a way that is true to her heritage but also acceptable to Americans.

2.1. Hair and Black Identity

Hair and black identity are deeply interconnected. Hair is often seen as a symbol of black identity and pride, it is often used to express one's cultural heritage and sense of self. Many black people express themselves through their hair.

As her new life shift to America, Ifemelu is struggling with her African-American identity as she always seen as an outsider. Ifemelu, had grown watching her mother doing her hair, this memory can be traumatizing as it can be affectionate one, but for Ifemelu has always been fascinated by her mother's hair. Ifemelu remembers growing in 'in the shadow of her mother's hair':

It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration. Her father called it a crown of glory. "Is it your real hair?" strangers would ask, and then reach out to touch it reverently.⁷

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's hair plays a major role in the exploration of her identity as an African immigrant in the United States. As a child in Nigeria, Ifemelu's hair was celebrated due to its beauty and thickness. Her mother would lovingly maintain her hair, plait it into complex designs, and braid it in special parts. When she moves to the United States, however, Ifemelu discovers that her natural hair is not accepted in mainstream society; white Americans view her African hair as "unprofessional," making her feel out of place and embarrassed because of her Nigerian heritage. This can be seen when her Auntie Uju advises her to straighten her hair for job interviews if she wants to succeed. *"If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional"*⁸ Something that Ifemelu took sarcastically and ask her *"If there are no doctors with braided hair in America."*⁹ In response, Auntie Uju tells her: *"You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed"*¹⁰.

As she navigates life in the U.S., she finds herself experimenting with different hairstyles to try to fit in, including straightening her hair and adding weave extensions. These changes to her appearance not only reflect Ifemelu's desire to conform to what is considered

“acceptable” in American culture, but also demonstrate her struggle to reconcile her Nigerian identity with her new American one. Ultimately, Ifemelu learns to embrace her natural hair despite the cultural differences between her home in Nigeria and her new life in the U.S. According to Hall, the identity of an individual is determined by “*their position within the larger frameworks of institutions, social structures, and history that in turn shape their subjectivity.*”¹¹

For Ifemelu, hair reveals a person’s identity, status and sense of self. Even if Ifemelu does not understand the relation between braids and professional career, for Auntie Uju, straightening her hair is a way to achieve her career ambitions and a way to adjust to American society.

When Ifemelu prepares for job interview she remembers the advice of her Auntie Uju that tells her to straight her hair in order to be professional. In addition, she must relax her hair or at least have the white girl curls. In this way, *Americanah* shows how closely linked hair can be with identity and empowerment. It illustrates how society’s beauty standards can impact an individual’s sense of self-worth. By embracing her natural hair, Ifemelu learns to love and accept herself, providing readers with an important lesson about self-love. Therefore, if African immigrants continue to fall prey to the Anglo-American definitions of beauty, they run the risk of losing their cultural identities.

2.2. Language and Accent

Throughout the novel, Ifemelu tries different ways to fit to the American society as an African immigrant, such as changing her accent to sound more American. She eventually realizes that she cannot completely hide her identity and must instead find ways to accept and embrace her culture and tradition.

English language is a kind of costume for Ifemelu’s father, he always tries to teach her to speak English in a young age in order to have a good accent so that she could seem educated

and impress others, as it is stated in the novel *"but his mannered English bothered her as she get older"*¹² but she prefers to speak in Igbo language. Furthermore, even in U.S she teaches her cousin Dike Igbo in order to communicate with him, which shows her desire to maintain her African identity. In this sense Hall stated: *"Identity is the ground of action (...) a notion of the continuous, self-sufficient, developmental, unfolding, inner dialectic of selfhood .We are never quite there, but always on our way to it, and when we get there , we will at last know exactly who it is we are"*.¹³

However, in United States, Ifemelu is forced to adopt to a whole new language and set of accent, which initially makes her feel uncomfortable and out of place. When Ifemelu tries to register in the University she meets with Cristina a white woman who starts to speak slowly when she sees Ifemelu, because for her she is black so she is not capable to understand English, this what pushes Ifemelu to start adopting an American accent in speaking English language in order to fit better within the society. By doing so, she begins to realize the value of having a perfect accent, but, she no longer decided to give up her American accent because she understand that this accent was just *"a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not her"*¹⁴. This fits with Stuart Hall's idea since he claimed that identity contains the notion of the true self, which is a form of guarantee of authenticity, offers us a sense of depth in both the individual and society¹⁵. Furthermore, Hall emphasized the concept of 'the true self' and explained:

*The logic of identity is the logic of something like a "true self". And the language of identity has often been related to the search for a kind of authenticity to one's experience, something that tells me where I come from. The logic and language of identity is the logic of depth-in here, deep inside me, is myself which I can reflect upon. It is an element of continuity. I think most of us do recognize that our identities have changed over time, but we have the hope or nostalgia that they change at the rate of a glacier. So, while we're not the fledglings that we were when we were one year old, we are the same sort of person*¹⁶.

Adichie brings Hall conception of dual identities to life by subjugating her personal identity under the influence of white American culture.

Language allows Ifemelu to create a sense of belonging which help her make sense of her own identity and discover what it means to be an African in a globalized world. Language is therefore fundamental for Ifemelu's journey towards self-discovery as it serves as a platform for her to explore and express her identity. In addition, Hall emphasizes the importance of language in identity formation. He states that language is often used to construct and symbolize identity, and that individuals use language to perform their identities, he suggests that understanding how language is used within different contexts can provide insight into how identities are formed.

2.3. Ifemelu's Identity Formation

As she adjusts to live in US, Ifemelu must negotiate between the way she is expected to behave in Nigeria and the way she must behave in America, while also reconciling her own personal identity as a strong and intelligent black woman.

After going back to Nigeria, Ifemelu appears to have lost her true identity this can be seen in her behavior. Ranyundo her friend observes that she is acting like an American when she says: "*you are no longer behaving like an Americanah*"¹⁷. She is always complaining and compares everything to American society, she is neither a true African nor a true American. This point echoes with Stuart hall's conception of identity, he claimed that identity is acquired through our experience in our society.

Curt, Ifemelu's new American boyfriend has given her a new identity as he made her integrate to his white social group which gives her the opportunity to improve and rebuilds her self-confidence as it mentioned in the novel: "*that what curt had given her, this gift of contentment, of ease. She had slipped out of her old skin*"¹⁸. Stuart Hall describes identity as a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. "*It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself*"¹⁹. Accordingly the self cannot develop or create itself in isolation it has to interact with others to

become aware of itself. When African immigrants leave their home country, they find themselves in a position to choose between their old identities or to adapt to the alien identity which bring them greater chances. While Ifemelu tries to integrate to curt's white world, she understand that she is different this can be seen when she was with curt and his friends; white and wealthy men like him, and he was telling them a story when he used the word "blowhard", this simple word made Ifemelu accepts the fact that she is different as she never be familiar with a such word.

Living in diaspora impact people's lives and perspectives, it made them see things differently as it is the case of Ifemelu and obinze who change their identities in order to fit with the new Western cultures. This can be seen in their preference in some stuffs such as food when they were in a restaurant in Nigeria and Ifemelu asked the waiter about potatoes "*it is the imported ones*"²⁰, yet their identity is questioned as they prefer imported potatoes over real ones. This show how Ifemelu looks at Nigerian people and things after living in America and how she developed a Western perspective. Stuart Hall's theoretical argument about cultural identification is consistent with what Adichie puts in the mouth of her fictional character. He says, "*Difference, therefore, persists- in and alongside continuity*"²¹. While Hall's research focuses on the ways in which diversity and continuity shape Caribbean identity, the theory he proposes here informs Adichie's examination of the distinctions and continuities between Africans in America and African Americans.

Blain another man that Ifemelu dates in America, his wold does not differ from curt's one because in both relations people around her make it difficult on her as she does not belong to the white society. Ifemelu finds herself in both relations cannot be herself she is always forced to change and play a role. Obinze, her black boyfriend from Nigeria unlike other men accepts Ifemelu in the way she is he does not try to change her on the contrary, he always supports her.

Ifemelu different relations affect her identity and made her form a new one in order to prove herself and live her true self.

END NOTES

¹ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*. London: Sage, 1996, 222.

² Ibid, 222.

³ Aidoo, Ata Ama. *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflection from a Black-eyed Squint*. England: Pearson, 1977, 09.

⁴ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 223.

⁵ Aidoo, Ata Ama. *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflection from a Black-eyed Squint*. England: Pearson, 1977, 64.

⁶ Ibid, 99.

⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi, *Americanah* (New York: Preston, 2013), 40.

⁸ Ibid, 119.

⁹ Ibid, 119.

¹⁰ Ibid, 119.

¹¹ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 229.

¹² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi, *Americanah*, 120.

¹³ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 228.

¹⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi, *Americanah*, 216.

¹⁵ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 146.

¹⁶ Ibid, 226.

¹⁷ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi, *Americanah*, 201.

¹⁸ Ibid, 135.

¹⁹ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 135.

²⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, 258.

²¹ Stuart, Hall. *Cultural Identity and Diasporas*, 227.

B. Chapter Two: Racism in *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Americanah*

1. Racism in *Our Sister Killjoy*

Our Sister Killjoy examines the ways in which racism is perpetuated through language, stereotypes and norms. The novel ultimately argues that racism can have a profound impact on individuals and their sense of self.

1.1. Whites' Supremacy

In the novel *Our Sister Killjoy*, Ama Ata Aidoo, attempts to represent the reality of African suffering with racism in Europe. Aidoo has witnessed cruel behavior and attitudes from white people against black students for one and only reason their different skin color. White people, believe in their superiority over blacks because this is what the past colonial discourse has taught them; everything which is not white is inferior, they view Africa as a blank space and African people as unhuman, uncivilized and illiterate.

Sissie's first encounter with racism is on a plane, when a white hostess asks Sissie to go to the back of the plane in order to join other black African students. The narrator comments:

*Immediately after they were airborne and instructions had come
For them to loosen their belts and feel free to smoke, a neatly
Coiffure hostess of the airline walked to her. She said, " you want
to join your two friends at the back, yes?"¹*

From this Aidoo wants to show to the reader how a black person is assessed and marginalized based on his black skin color.

In Europe, Sissie feels out of place because of the negative prejudices that she has to face daily because she is black. She hardly believes that present racial conceptions are the results of past colonialism in Africa. Then, she feels as a victim of old racial discrimination that

still exist in present time. She asserts; *“We are victims of our history and our present. They place too many obstacles in the way of love, and we cannot enjoy even our differences in peace.”*² In *Black Skin, White masks*, Fanon saw colonialism as a kind of dominance, whose primary purpose was to reorganize the world of indigenous people: *“The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior”*³.

European colonizers create stereotypes in order to justify illegal colonial rules and affirm their superiority against black people. According to Fanon, the racist generates the inferior, which implies that the black people do not feel intrinsically inferior to white people. White individuals, on the other hand, contribute to his feeling of inferiority by arguing that the difference between white and black is significant and that white is superior to black. Racism establishes a hierarchy, which instills in black people a sense of inferiority that they absorb through time⁴.

Sissie’s journey outside Africa, makes her recognize herself as a black person, it is her first time that she pays attention to her skin color. At the train station, Sissie, is shocked hearing a white mother telling her daughter *“Das Schwartz Madchen”*⁵ which means ‘black girl’, as if it is strange to be a person with a skin color that is not white. Aidoo states:

*But what she also came to know was that someone
somewhere*

*Would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to
be mean.*

*A way to get land, land, more land*⁶

Sissie is having trouble to adjust with her new surroundings and dealing with all the racial dynamic that dominate European societies.

In Germany, Sissie and other black immigrants are seen as animals, because of their different skin color. Beginning from the white woman in the train station to Sissie’s teacher

who also points out on her as being the only black girl in the campus. This is exemplified in the following quote: “*A dog among the masters. Most masterly of the dogs.*”⁷ Here the teacher wants to make Sissie remember that she is only an inferior black person among the whites who are the masters, and even she shares the same campus with white people but she can never be part of the white society and she should not forget who she really is ‘a dog’.

In the noel, Aidoo highlights on the hard conditions under which the black workers go through in Europe, she comments:

*Black construction workers
Sweat under the topical sun, making
Ice-skating rinks for
The beautiful people...
With vacant stares
Or
Busy, spiting their lungs out.
Just like the good old days
Before independence.”⁸*

Here Aidoo wants to show the reader that the black workers in Europe work as if they still under the colonial rules.

Aidoo, maintains that racism is only a social and historical phenomena, she believes that white people see themselves superior only because they have the privilege to be born white which is for them the powerful and dominant race. As Fanon says in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and

even deny anything that doesn't fit in with the core belief"⁹.

The colonial discourse that misrepresent Africa as blank space and Africans as dark, dangerous, etc., affect the European brains on how they view and interact with black people which causes a fear of blacks and their culture. This can be explain in the concept of black negrophobia by Fanon when he says:

*"Negrophobia exists. It is not hatred of the Negro, however, that motivates them; they lack the courage for that, or they have lost it. Hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. 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 Americans have substituted discrimination for lynching. Each to his side of the street"*¹⁰

Black man in particular is underestimate by the whites, this can be seen in the novel when three white friends are talking about Africa and its governance:

*How can a
Nigger rule well
Unless his balls and purse are
Clutched in
Expert white hands?* ¹¹

From this, we can understand that black man is seen as uncivilized and ignorant, for the white ideologies he can do anything without their help.

The author tries to show white people's view of the blacks and demonstrates how white people are deluded by their belief in their own superiority. Sissie has to face the reality of racism in a way she has never encountered before, forcing her to see how racial difference is used to establish and hold up power structures.

1.2. Negative Valuation of the Whites

Sissie encounter with racism makes her become more aware of the nature of her journey. From the racist situation on the plane when the hostess asks her to go to the back of the plane to join other black students to the train station where a white German mother who points out her finger and calls her 'black girl', Sissie's living period in Germany is marked also by her relation with Marija a white German housewife who seems to ignore all what does not concerns the West. She even cannot recognize that Sissie is a black woman because she thoughts she Indian. This cann explain how racism is linked to Marija as her racism is displayed by her ignorance of non-western culture.

Aidoo, throuh her character Sissie, demonstrates clearly that she has no intention of admiring the European people neither their culture. She explains through Marija how white people can be ignorant of what does not represent Europe; they are are ignorant of other cultures, as Marija represent another kind of racism who considers the non -European race as inferior.

Aidoo, tries to demonstrate the negatives of the white societies by criticizing even their food and ways of eating, she comments:

Sissie would always puzzle over it. Cold food. Even after she had taught her tongue to accept them, she could never really understand why people ate cold food. To eat ordinary cooked food that has gone cold without bothering to heat it is unpleasant enough. But to actually chill food in order to eat it was totally beyond her understanding. In the end, she decided it had something to do with white skins, corn silk hair and very cold weather¹²

By doing so, she wants to make the whites feel inferior and challenges the stereotypes that shows the blacks as savages. In fact, Aidoo reverses the order of superior-inferior system. She shows how pride she is to be black and affirms her disgustingness of the white skin color, values and culture.

But oh, her skin. It seemed as if according to the motion of her emotions Marija's skin kept switching on and switching off like a two-colour neon sign. So that switching her against the light of the dying summer sun, Sissie could not help thinking that it must be a pretty dangerous matter, being white. It made you awfully exposed, rendered you terribly vulnerable. Like being born without your skin or something, As though the Maker had fashioned the body of a human, stuffed it into a polythene bag instead of the regular protective covering and turned it loose into the world¹³.

Aidoo, reinforces Sissie's sense of superiority by giving her a higher level of education and a fluent English which makes other German like Marija who cannot speak English clearly feel inferior and less educated than Sissie. Aidoo, wants to explain to the reader that white people themselves can be less educated than black people. A good example of this when Marija lists what she has for dinner; she used the word "flesh" instead of "meat"¹⁴.

When Marija Affirms being less educated than Sissie and regrets to not continue her education, this affirms once again Sissie's superior position:

Marija's eyes were red. She was saying that since she had met Sissie, she had been wishing she was better educated to go places ... Not just like any tourist. Sissie says she was sorry. Not wanting pity, Marija smiled, saying it was good to have Little Adolf who would go to university, travel and come back to tell her about his journeys¹⁵.

According to Fanon, the racist produces the inferior since black people do not feel inferior to white people by nature. White individuals, on the other hand, contribute to this feeling of inferiority by arguing that the difference between white and black is significant and that white is superior to black. Aidoo, through her main character Sissy, aimed to make white people inferior to black people. Sissy rejects the white society she is the racist here and tries to inverse the stereotype. Fanon states that: *"The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior"*¹⁶.

When Marija shows sexual desire to Sissie and in return Sissie rejects her, is a way to show how the life of the white sis meaningless, she demonstrates the family life of the European where the husband neglect his obligation towards his wife and abandon her days and months in a pursuit of a better life. Aidoo, wants to shed light how their life is boring and full of misery that is to say the Western societies are not as perfect as they pretend to be in order to glorify them and act superior. Fanon analyzes intercultural sexuality, lust, and its implications on ethnic discrimination. Ethnic desire as means of self-destruction in the desire to be white or to enhance one's status in reference to other race, Whiteness makes an appearance in Fanon's theories, in this viewpoint all images of intercultural for fanon sexuality is pathological¹⁷.

In *Our Sister Killjoy*, Aidoo criticizes the European values that treat animals better than Africans, a society where dogs and cats eat better than a human being. This makes Aidoo angry on black immigrants that live in poverty and suffering but still idealize the Western culture.

Aidoo has succeeded in overturning the traditional picture of the African colonized in *Our Sister Killjoy*. In other words, she has flipped the western binary system on its head, transformed it and demolished it. Aidoo makes repeated references to the impact of colonialism on her people throughout the text. Sissie has been effectively employed by her as a symbol of the African woman who opposes colonial ideals and racism

2. Racism in *Americanah*

In *Americanah* several characters struggles from racial discrimination and prejudices. Racism still a huge issue even in today's America. Since skin color and hair texture of the blacks refers to ugliness and make them feel inferior black women try to change their appearance in order to get the dominant beauty ideals in America. Adichie portrays many racial situations through a black female perspective.

2.1. The Skin Color Question

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu discovers that she is Black from the moment she arrived in United States and states that: “*black is at the bottom of America’s race ladder*”¹⁸. She also discovers that being black is different from being white, because whiteness brings you privileges and better opportunities while blackness gives you hard life.

When Ifemelu first steps foot in America, she knows she is black. “*I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America*”¹⁹ Ifemelu's idea that black people grew aware of their blackness in white's people's environment is supported by Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* view: “*As long as the black man remains in his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others...For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.*”²⁰

At the beginning Ifemelu was surprised by knowing that in order to get a work in U.S she has to pretend to be someone else, for example, Auntie Ujy lends her social security card and driver license of another black Nigerian woman the thing that surprised Ifemelu because the woman in question look older than her, Auntie Uju response to that is “*all of us look alike to white people*”²¹. This is simply the beginning of Ifemelu’s observations about race codifications in U.S. Therefore, Ifemelu understands that her skin color will always be a problem in her everyday life in America.

Many of Adichie's Black characters, like Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju, and her son Dike suffer from racism and the consequences of Africa's primitiveness. As a matter of fact, the protagonist, Ifemelu, is obliged to change not just her name but also her accent to meet racial expectations. Because the Igbo language is illegal in America, Dike, Auntie Uju's Nigerian son, is forbidden from attempting to learn his native tongue. Every African, regardless of where they were born, is supposed to be an adept in Voodoo and all types of damaging spiritual activities.

This can be seen when Ifemelu was talking to her roommate about her dog eating her food and her roommate responds in a humoristic way “*you better not kill my dog with voodoo.*”²² Adichie tries to demonstrate that when people are racist they often claim they are only joking in order to put the problem aside.

Dike, on the other hand, become a victim of his skin color in his school and is always accused when something goes wrong at school. One such case is described in the text as follows:

“Has Dike [Aunty Uju’s son] told you about the computer incident at school?” Aunty Uju asked. “No, what?” Ifemelu asked.

The principal called me on Monday to say that Dike hacked into the school’s computer network on Saturday. This is a boy who was with me all day on Saturday. We went to Hartford to visit Ozavisa. We were there the whole day and the boy did not go near a computer. When I asked why they thought it was him, they said they got information. Imagine, you just wake up and blame my son. The boy is not even good with computers. Kweku wants us to lodge a formal complaint, but I don’t think it’s worth the time...

I don’t even know how to hack,” Dike said. “Why would they do this sort of rubbish?” Ifemelu asked. “You have to blame the black kid first,” he [Dike] said. Later, he told her how his friends would say, “Hey, Dike, got some weed?” and how funny it was... “So of course it had to be me that hacked into the school’s network”²³

Certainly, the accusation against Dike is without merit. He says he does not “*even know how to hack*”²⁴. Nonetheless, he is charged with the crime because, as he confesses, “*one has to blame the black kid first*”²⁵. Again because he is black, he must have “*some weed*”²⁶ or use “*voodoo*”²⁷. As Fanon argues “*O my body, make of me always a man who questions*”²⁸ because he is black, because he is different Dike faces rejections of basic rights at the same school, as the only true black child at his school, he experienced several obstacles racial prejudice. He was so depressed as a result of racist comments and actions from his classmates and teachers that he tries to commit suicide.

Ifemelu learns about race in America and a new identity is imposed on her, identity that makes her look like white people, identity that makes her look like something she could never have imagined in Nigeria, identity that makes her see her culture and her Kinky hair as inferior, the one that makes her look substandard; and the one that makes her see herself as fake. She gets tired from being taught to believe she is inferior; it makes her depressed, sad, and bored of America. Ifemelu is forced to act and seem like white people in order to benefit significantly from America. Blacks are traumatized daily and are not recognized. In the chapter "*The Fact of Blackness*" Fanon remembers how he felt in France when a white stranger made insulting remarks about his blackness, such as 'filthy nigger':

*"On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that splattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come light and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together"*²⁹.

When Ifemelu and Curt, her white boyfriend walked into a restaurant, the host looked at them and asked Curt, "*Table for one?*"³⁰ As if he did not see Ifemelu, to put it another way, the host did not give importance to Ifemelu because she is black and blacks in this country are viewed as non-human, so she is unworthy to sit at a table in contrast to her white boyfriend. Later, Ifemelu speaks about this situation and says that America shows you racism in the most sophisticated ways, she posts that: "*In America, racism exists but racists 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*"³¹. Fanon argued that: "*At the risk of arousing the resentment of many colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man*"³². He is saying that black and white are not only a hierarchical division inside the human species, or 'man'. In a racist society, only white people

are considered human whereas people of color are labeled as other to human, beasts and animals.

Racism in *Americanah* is subtly concealed, making it all the more pernicious. White people believe they are superior to black people regardless of color, whether they are true black or have 'some exotic quota,' and they refer to them all as black and colored.

2.2. Hair as a Perfect Metaphor of Race

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu is not the only character who faces a terrible hair experience in America. Her experience appears to be representative of the other character's experience.

In the first chapter, Ifemelu is on her way to a black salon to have braids, Aisha a black woman who works in the salon asks Ifemelu: “*Why you don’t have relaxer?*”³³, “*I like my hair the way God made it.*”³⁴ Ifemelu replied. We notice that hair becomes a symbol of freedom as Ifemelu prefers natural over superficial hair. Black women are expected to meet American beauty standards, for Aisha relaxing your hair makes you look like a white woman. Ifemelu refuses to relax her hair is a way to protest against American society that makes no place to black beauty.

In *Americanah*, the human hair is a visible part of everyone's identity; it is shown as a powerful metaphor for racism. Adichie's portrayal of hair politics in the novel is fascinating and engaging, and it reveals a lot about self-image politics in the twenty-first century. For one reason, despite the fact that Ifemelu has become a Fellow at Princeton and a Condor Owner, her ever-changing hairstyle in the narrative shows a rising sense of discomfort in America. Mercer points out that the stigmatization of black people's hair did not gain its historical intransigence by being a mere idea, but rather where race is a constitutive element of social structure and social division, hair remains powerfully charged with symbolic currency³⁵. From his writings, very little has changed from the plantation period to today arguing that plantation

societies instituted a 'pigmentocracy' thus a division of labor based on racial hierarchy in which one's socioeconomic position could be signified by one's skin color³⁶.

In her blog, Ifemelu wrote her observation that hair seemed to be *"the perfect metaphor for race in America"*³⁷ after realizing that her friend was completely unaware of the nature of black hair. Mercer argues that *"where 'race' structures social relations of power, hair –as visible as skin color, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference- takes on another forcefully symbolic dimension"*³⁸. He contends that *"if racism is conceived as an ideological code in which biological attributes are invested with societal values and meanings, then it is because our hair is perceived within this framework that is burdened with a range of negative connotations"*³⁹. This observation clearly underpins the idea that hair plays an important role in apportioning socio-economic status, shaping the identity and beauty standards of people.

There are multiple types and textures of African hair, *"The one constant Africans share when it comes to hair is the social and cultural significance intrinsic to each beautiful strand"*⁴⁰. Despite their various differences, people are united by their shared experiences with hair texture that is unique to them⁴¹. While it would be incorrect to study specific groups as monoliths, it is crucial to recognize that shared characteristics and components of identity can bring disparate identities together, especially when one is the "other" in regard to a dominating group⁴². Ifemelu was able to discover a sense of belonging in America, understandable, through her hair. After she experienced serious damage to her hair and scalp from relaxer burns, Wambui pushed her to cut her hair and go natural, because according to her, *"relaxing your hair is like being in prison - you're caged in. Your hair rules you... you're always battling to make your hair do what it wasn't meant to do"*⁴³. At first Ifemelu struggled to accept her short hair, even one of her coworkers asks her if her cut means *"something political"*⁴⁴ which explain that the black hair style is seen as a political symbol, but she soon found comfort in an online natural hair community called 'Happily KinKy Nappy.com'; a group of women who *"were done with*

pretending that their hair was what it was not, done with running from the rain and flinching from sweat"⁴⁵. This website made her fall in love with her natural hair.

Following a series of setbacks in the text, Ifemelu encounter with a racist situation but this time was from another black man; when she was with Curt in a market shop, a black man asks her “*you ever wonder why he likes you look all jungle like that*”⁴⁶, but Curt didn’t hear him and this makes her feel dispirited. This situation demonstrate that even black people themselves believe that their hair is less beautiful and they can be racist against each other.

Mercer contends that if racism is conceived as an ideological code in which biological attributes are invested with societal values and meanings, then it is because our hair is perceived within this framework that it is burdened with a range of negative connotations⁴⁷. He further posits that classical ideologies established a classificatory symbolic system of color, with white and black signifiers of a fundamental polarization of human worth – ‘superiority/inferiority’⁴⁸. *Distinctions of aesthetic value ‘beautiful /ugly’ have always been central to the way racism divides the world into binary oppositions in its adjudication of human worth*⁴⁹.

Throughout *Americanah*, readers witness how the Black characters are treated inhospitably because of their skin color and hair. In the end, Ifemelu, Obinze, Dike, and Auntie Uju face social, economic, and psychological difficulties for being different, in fact, for being the 'Other'. In many ways, *Americanah* reveals that being a Black person in today's Euro-America is akin to living as an uninteresting sequence of mimicry. To put it another way, living as a Black person there is being forced through a maze of conformity, near total assimilation, and surrender. To fight is nearly futile, and as the characters' experiences in the text demonstrate, knowledge of this forced compliance drives the protagonists to lie restlessly and trudge through a bipolar existence.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy or Reflection from a Black-eyed Squint*. England: Pearson, 1977, 10.
- ² Ibid, 17.
- ³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto, 1986, 69.
- ⁴ Derek, Hook. *Fanon and the psychoanalysis of racism*. London: 2004, 114-137.
- ⁵ Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*, 12.
- ⁶ Ibid, 13.
- ⁷ Ibid, 42.
- ⁸ Ibid, 56.
- ⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. 69.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 88.
- ¹¹ Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*, 68.
- ¹² Ibid, 76.
- ¹³ Ibid, 38.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 101.
- ¹⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 69.
- ¹⁶ Chimamanda Ngozi Adchie. *Americanah*. New York: Preston, 2013,220.
- ¹⁷ Yokum, N. *A call for psycho-affective change: Fanon, feminism, and white negrophobic femininity*. 2002, 22.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 221.
- ¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 87.
- ²⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adchie. *Americanah*, 120.
- ²¹ Ibid, 330.
- ²² Ibid, 348.
- ²³ Ibid, 349.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 349.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 350.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 350.
- ²⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 206.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 85.

- ²⁹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, 295.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*, 315.
- ³¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 01.
- ³² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, 10.
- ³³ *Ibid*, 10.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 297.
- ³³ Kobena Mercer. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Position in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994,101.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 101.
- ³⁵ Mildred N. Sikuku, Ben Nyongesa, *Black Hair and Beauty in Race Relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. 2019, 42.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, 43.
- ³⁷ Byrd, Ayana D., and Lori L. Tharps. *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America. Revisited*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2014, 09.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, 10.
- ³⁹ *Ibid*, 10.
- ⁴⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, 208.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, 209.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, 331.
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, 331.
- ⁴⁴ Mildred N. Sikuku, Ben Nyongesa, *Black Hair and Beauty in Race Relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. 2019, 52.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 53.
- ⁴⁶ Kobena Mercer. *Welcome to the Jungle*, 101.

VIII. General Conclusion

In this research we compared the novels of Ama Ata Aidoo's "*Our Sister Killjoy*" (1977) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "*Americanah*" (2013), two writers who represent two different generations, the first set of west African women writers, 'the old guard' and the present generation who will be referred to as the 'new order'.

In the first chapter, we have discussed the issue of identity in *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) and *Americanah* (2013) focusing on the two females protagonists of the two novels Sissie and Ifemelu and their struggle to maintain their African Identity in two different white societies. In fact, Sissie contrary to Ifemelu is a strong and assume her identity while Ifemelu finds difficulties with her African identity at the beginning of her journey but slowly she learns how to form a new identity that represent her as a person.

Similarly, in the second chapter we have explored the issue of racism in both novels underlying the experiences of Sisse, Ifemelu and other secondary characters who have suffered from racial discrimination based on their skin color, hair texture and physical appearance. In fact, both novel's characters struggled with white superiority and their racial behavior against the black immigrants.

After analyzing the novels, we have reached the conclusion that both Ama Ata Aidoo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have treated the concept of identity and racism in a similar way. Through an exploration of the experiences of migration *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Americanah* delves into the complexities of race and the impact of location and environment on identity. The protagonists in both novels have their life completely overturned by their expatriation to the U.S and U.K, where their idealized concept of this new world is challenged by an inhospitable reality.

Aidoo and Adichie, both successfully transmit an authentic immigrant experience, from dealing with racism, discrimination, culture shock, and identity crisis that the main characters

overcome with a firm mindset. The study uncovers the struggles of the main characters, including diaspora, identity crisis, and culture shock. Walking along with the main characters as they experience life in the United States and the United Kingdom for the first time and witnesses their attempts at battling racism and discrimination, as well as their relationship with nature and their coping with the recurring environmental changes from Nigeria to the States. Furthermore, the study reveals the main character's struggles with their identity and how they eventually end up choosing love and home over the American dream.

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