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**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou**  
**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
**Department of English**



Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree  
of Master in English

Field: Letters and Foreign Languages

-Specialty: Literature Interdisciplinary Approaches

**Title**

***Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things that Heaven  
Bears* (2007) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's  
*Americanah*(2013): A Comparative Study***

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## **Acknowledgements**

We, first and foremost, thank Allah for granting us the strength and determination to complete this research work. We express our sincere thanks and gratitude to our supervisor Pr. Nadia NAAR GADA for her supervision of this work, for her continuous support, advice, and availability at every moment.

Our gratitude also goes to the board of examiners; we are so grateful for having accepted to read, examine, and assess our work

## **Dedication**

*To my dearest parents: Mohammed and Yamina for their endless love and support*

*My cherished sister: Nadjat and her small family*

*My left hand Daniel and his lovely family*

*My two lovely brothers: Hamza and Rayane*

*To my Grandparents and to the best Aunts and Uncles, I offer my deepest gratitude*

*To my treasured friends with whom I cried and laughed,*

*I am endlessly thankful for the camaraderie we share*

*I dedicate this work to my thesis partner Katia and her entire family.*

**Chahinaz**

*To my dearest parents whose encouragement and sacrifice have been my guiding light on this  
academic journey.*

*My beloved brothers; Farid, Mourad and Hocine and their adorable families*

*My beloved sister Zahia and her lovely family, without forgetting my source of happiness my  
niece Lisa*

*My cherished friends, whose friendship is a treasure, and my purple world which holds a  
special place in my heart, your presence has filled my life with joy and love*

*I dedicate this work to my thesis partner Chahinaz and her entire family*

**Katiahv**

## **Abstract**

This research study is a comparative analysis of the novels *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Denaw Mengestu (2007) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The objective of this research is to delve into the various challenges experienced by the protagonist. Moreover, the study aims to examine the cultural clash that shapes the experiences and difficulties faced by the protagonists Sepha Stephanos and Ifemelu. To achieve our goal, we have incorporated Homi K.Bhabha concepts of 'Mimicry' and 'Hybridity'. Initially, we focus on the common complexities that Sepha Stephanos encounters as an African Immigrant, as well as the challenges faced by Ifemelu in America, and upon her return to Nigeria. Also we delve into the evolution of identity of the protagonists with particular emphasis on their cross-cultural interactions, self-discovery and their personal growth. Consequently, our comprehensive analysis of the chosen novels leads us to a discerning conclusion. Mengestu and Adichie share common perspectives towards racism and cultural clash.

**Keywords:** Denaw Mengestu, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Mimicry, Hybridity, Cultural Clash, racism.

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## **I. General Introduction:**

Our dissertation is a contribution to “Migration literature”, a literary genre that examines a variety of experiences, challenges, and consequences of migration on individual and collective levels. This genre includes literary works produced by or about migrants, refugees, or people who have moved from one geographical or cultural context to another. (Academic Accelerator, n.d). Our comparative study of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* aims to illustrate the complex and multifaceted aspects of human migration, including the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of the phenomenon. More precisely, our comparison of the two works aims to delve into questions of identity, belonging, isolation, loneliness and the cultural clash or fusion that happens when individuals or groups move between different cultural or social contexts. Therefore, immigration from African countries is complex because it involves people leaving their homes to move to other places for various reasons. Some leave due to conflict or poverty, seeking safety and better opportunities elsewhere. Others may migrate for education, work, or to reunite with family members. However, immigration can also be challenging due to barriers such as legal restrictions, discrimination, and cultural differences in the new country. Despite these challenges, immigrants often contribute to their new communities through their skills, culture, and diverse perspectives. Managing immigration effectively requires addressing root causes, promoting inclusivity, and providing support for newcomers to integrate and thrive in their new homes. That is why we wanted to examine these migration novels as they have illustrated this reasons.

As we delve into the idea of “Migration Literature”, it becomes evident that narratives of immigration from African countries often compelling insights into the complexities of the immigrant experience. Thus, the choice of the novels *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* serves as poignant

examples, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by African immigrants as they navigate new environments while struggling with a longing for their homelands.

The main purpose of our comparison of the two novels is to highlight the different complexities faced by immigrants and the cultural conflicts that occur when people from different backgrounds come into contact with each other. As vehicles for commentary on social and political issues, the two novels provide firsthand accounts of the migrant experience. Both address migration in various historical periods and under different circumstances, from forced migrations due to conflicts to voluntary migrations seeking for economic opportunities. These conflicts stem from differences in traditions, beliefs, and values, which can lead to misunderstandings and tensions. Individuals may struggle to navigate unfamiliar customs and norms, feeling out of place or misunderstood. Additionally, societal prejudices and stereotypes can exacerbate these conflicts, creating barriers to meaningful connection and understanding. However, these cultural clashes also offer opportunities for growth, empathy and mutual learning as individuals strive to bridge the divide and find common ground. Ultimately, navigating cultural conflicts requires open-mindedness, empathy, and a willingness to engage in dialogue and mutual respect. Consequently, throughout our comparative perspective of the two novels, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, we shall examine the themes of migration, loneliness, nostalgia and alienation. Yet, before starting the comparison of the two novels, it might be useful to begin by a short literature review concerning the criticism devoted to the selected works.

#### **a. Review of the Literature:**

Our readings of Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) reveal that both novels have been studied by many critics from different perspectives and have been compared to various

literary works. The work of Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is concerned; the novel was published in Britain and the United States and caught the attention of many scholars, writers and critics. In his literary review, Rob Nixon (2007) described the content of the novel as "The animate presence of the loss". He praised the writer's skill in how he expresses himself and the immigrants living in America. In addition to the feelings of pain, loss, exile and displacement contained in the lines of the novel, the critic confirms that almost every page reminds us that "Departure" and "Arrival", which represent two decisive and deceptive words. He adds that the novel is a Great African novel, a great Washington novel and a great American novel. (The New York Times, 2007)

Last but not least, Chris Abani (2007) writes that Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* presents many different themes, such as exile, gentrification, inequality and many others. He assumes that it is rare to find such complex character that embodies the feeling of contradiction, as being dark but honest, and hopeful but depressed. All of these features show the reality of America, a country that gives you nothing for nothing. In addition to the main character's painful memories and experiences, the author helps people to be aware of how difficult the life of an immigrant is. (Latines, 2007)

As far as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, for instance, has been studied by many scholars, writers, and reviewers. As an illustration, Julia Wiklander (2016) in her review entitled, "*Race, Hair, Feminism and Norms*" she pointed out that *Americanah* "is not only a great book and a fascinating story, but also an important text that dissects modern culture and unveils layers of racism, and sexism". (girlsglobe, 2016) She argues that the novel helps the reader to discover and see the reality of the modern culture and how the world is unjust and racist. The novel helps to aware readers of social norms that oppress the lives of the Afro-American women or the Black African immigrants in the United States. With reference to the protagonist Ifemelu, the author explores the hardships of an African immigrant during her

studies in America. Julia adds that the issue of race affects the Black African women's daily life especially when she has to straighten their hair in order to fit the American ideal type.

For her part, Elizabeth Day (2013) argues that *Americanah* is not just a love story, but also explores issues of race, identity, cultural differences and what it means to be black in different worlds. The following passage tells more:

It is ostensibly a love story-the tale of childhood sweethearts at school in Nigeria, whose lives take different paths when they seek their fortunes in America and England but it is also a brilliant dissection of modern attitudes to race, spanning three continents and touching on issues of identity, loss and loneliness. (The Guardian, 2013)

The critic prizes the importance of the novel in relation to politics and its ability to attract readers with social issues. Overall, she concludes that the book is important and will continue to inspire conversations about race and identity.

### **b. Issue and Working Hypothesis:**

From the above brief review of literature, it appears that Dinaw Mengesy's *The Beautiful things That Heaven Bears* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* have been studied by numerous critics from various perspectives. However, to our knowledge, no previous study has yet put the two works together in a comparative way. This gap in research allows us to discover the similarities and differences between the two novels and encourage us to study interesting topics that have not been noticed before. Our comparison of the two novels will be based on the complexities faced by black immigrants. By comparing the portrayal and the impact of these challenges on the lives of the black immigrants, we shall explore the cultural conflicts that have shaped the experiences of the two protagonists, Sepha and Ifemelu, in their perspective narratives. For such a purpose, we plan to base our comparison on two important theoretical concepts, part of the Postcolonial Theory, by using Homi Bhabha's concepts of "Mimicry" and "Hybridity" in order to analyze and compare how the protagonists' life and the complexities of cross-cultural relationships as they are depicted by the two authors in the two selected narratives.

### **c. Methodological Outline:**

Our dissertation follows the IMRAD method; it is divided into five sections. The first section includes the Introduction, which is also divided into small sections, which starts with a presentation of our topic, and the aims of this research work. It is followed by a brief Review of the Previous Literature. Then, we built our Issue and Working Hypothesis on the basis of the mentioned previous studies. Lastly, we have set the Methodological Outline of our dissertation. The second section concerns the Methods and Materials that introduce and explain Homi K.Bhabha's concepts of "Mimicry" and "Hybridity" to our comparison of the two novels. It also includes the biographies of the authors and the summary of the novels. One section focuses on the important Results concerning our comparative study.

The last but not least part concerns Discussion in relation to the analysis of the two selected novels. It is divided into two chapters; the first one includes the Common Immigrant's Challenges in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*. The second chapter discusses The Evolution of Identity in the two narratives through characters and themes. Finally, the last section is a synthesis, which summarizes the main elements of this comparative study.

## **II. Methods and Materials:**

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research work is to compare and contrast the different complexities faced by immigrants and their self improvement. Therefore, in the exploration of themes within our chosen novels, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, we turn our attention to the concepts of “Mimicry” and “Hybridity”. These two theoretical concepts are to be found in postcolonial theory and they are introduced by Homi K.Bhabha. Both concepts are closely related to our main themes as it offers valuable insights into the immigrant experience, cultural adaptation, and the complexities of identity. By delving into these themes, we aim to discover how these challenges shapes the lives of the protagonists, Sepha and Ifemelu, and how it influences within the societies they inhabit. These concepts provide a lens through which we can better understand the characters’ experience and their comparable evolving identities in the context of immigration.

### **1. The Relevance of Homi K.Bhabha’s concepts to this Study:**

Homi K.Bhabha is an Indian scholar, critic, and theorist. He is known for his work in the field of postcolonial studies, mainly with his influential book entitled *The Location of Culture*, which was published in 1994. Homi Bhabha explores several concepts related to culture and identity such as “Ambivalence”, “Hybridity” and “Mimicry”. (Scholar Blogs, n.d).

In relation to our work, we will borrow mainly the concepts of “Mimicry” and “Hybridity” that are important because they help to explore and understand the complexities of the immigrant’s experience and the cultural identity, Bhabha highlights mainly the ways in which individuals adapt, negotiate, and sometimes transformed their ways of life and change their identities when they live in new environments in which the norms and culture differ from their owns.

### **a. Definition of “Mimicry”:**

“Mimicry” can be defined as a form of imitation or reproduction that involves copying the colonizer’s language and manners. It refers to the colonized people, like Africans and Indians, who try to ‘mimic’ or ‘adopt’ the cultural practices, language, values, attitudes, and habits of the colonizers in order to survive to resemble them. (Literarines, 2016) More significantly, according to Homi K. Bhabha, “Mimicry” is a key concept within Postcolonial Theory. The theorist points out in his essay entitled, *“Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”* that “Mimicry” can be a strategy used by the colonized subject to negotiate and respond to the dominant colonial culture. He asserts that: “Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (Bhabha, 1994, p.122). He, furthermore, suggests that “Mimicry” is elusive because it raises questions about authenticity, identity and cultural “Hybridity”, and it becomes an effective strategy by allowing the colonized to resist the colonial domination by articulating his or her own culture within the dominating colonial framework. The transformative potential of “Mimicry” rests on the fact that it can be a means to end colonial power and produce different forms of knowledge and resistance. Bhabha adds that: “Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents” (P.125). He also suggests that “Mimicry” includes only repetition or imitation of the dominant culture. However, it does not reproduce an exact copy of that culture. For him, the word ‘repeats’ means; that “Mimicry” involves imitation on behavior, customs, cultures, or practices of the colonizer. Bhabha concludes that imitation is never identical or exact, but it often accompanied by a subtle modification.

Now that we have explained what “Mimicry” is, it is useful to make clear its relevance to the two novels. From our point of view, in both *Americanah* and *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the main characters engage in forms of “Mimicry” throughout their

experiences far from their homelands. Through their efforts to adapt to their new environments in the United States, both characters face a variety of tensions. They live in dilemmas as they are caught between assimilation and their desire to keep their former cultural identities. The two novels illustrate, as we shall develop it more in the course of the Discussion part, how “Mimicry” can be a persistence tactic as well as a source of internal conflict. It is through the perspective of Bhabha’s concept of “Mimicry” that we can understand the characters’ struggles to try reuniting their cultural backgrounds with their experiences abroad. The two texts shed light on the complexities of immigrant experiences, the search for identity, and the ways in which dominant cultures can shape individuals’ behaviors and self-perceptions. The other concept, which is closely linked to “Mimicry”, is “Hybridity”.

#### **b. Hybridity:**

Homi K.Bhabha’s second concept of “Hybridity” which is also a central aspect of his Postcolonial theory, it can be defined as a cultural and social mixing that occurs as a result of the interaction between different cultures; it opens up spaces for alternative narratives and identities to emerge, and it challenge the dominance of the colonizer’s culture. (Tendfonline, 2019). Homi Bhabha writes in his essay “Signs Taken for Wonders” that: “Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, it is shifting forces and fixities, it is the name for the strategies reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 159).

“Hybridity” is a product created by colonialism, where the concept represents the ability of the colonized and the colonizer to come into contact and negotiate their identities. According to Bhabha, the colonial power relies on fixed categories. However, these fixed categories are not objected to change or resistance. Moreover, Bhabha argues that colonial power is not unchallenged force. Instead, “Hybridity” represents the productive resistance of

colonized subjects. Furthermore, Bhabha emphasizes that “Hybridity” is a site of contestation and resistance; he maintains that:

Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individualization that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority its rules of recognition” (P.162).

For him, “Hybridity” challenges the dominant discourse of colonial representation by incorporating other forms of knowledge that were previously denied. By accepting or allowing this ‘denied’ knowledge to enter the dominant discourse, “Hybridity” disrupts its authority and its rules.

For “Mimicry”, the concept of “Hybridity” can be applied to both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Dinaw Mengestu’s *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. The two notions help to explore and understand how individuals who shift from their countries to live abroad, negotiate their identities in multicultural societies. In both novels, the characters experience “Hybridity” as they shift from their original cultural identities to new ones due to different cultural contexts in which they find themselves. They face the problems of belonging, adaptability, and authenticity in a multicultural society. The two texts revolve around the complex and changing nature of identity, and show how individuals can create hybrid identities that reflect their diverse cultural influences and experiences in multicultural settings. More significantly, the two texts draw attention to the social, cultural, economic, and political inequalities that persist as a result of migration.

## **2. Dinaw Mengestu’s Biography:**

Dinaw Mengestu’s *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is inspired from the author’s own life experiences as an Ethiopian immigrant. Dinaw Mengestu was born on June 30, 1978, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He immigrated to the United States with his family at the age of two. He grew up in Illinois and continued his education, earning a Bachelor of Arts in English from Georgetown University and a Master of Fine Arts in Fiction from Columbia

University. (Penguin Random House, n.d) Then, he found himself caught between his Ethiopian heritage and his new identity as an American immigrant. This personal experience of displacement and cultural hybridity profoundly influenced his writings and mainly his first novel *“The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears”* was published in 2007 and received critical acclaim for its exploration of immigrant life and the challenges faced by African immigrants in the United States. In addition to his first novel, Mengestu has written other works, including *“How To Read The Air”* (2010) and *“All Our Names”* (2014), both fiction received positive reviews have earned him numerous awards and honors. His writing has been praised for its deep exploration of complex human experiences, especially within the context of immigration and cultural adaptation. (bookbrowse, n.d) Furthermore, like Adichie Ngozi, he was invited to speak at various events and conferences such as “Vanderbilt, 2021) and Dinaw Mengestu; “Sun Valley Writer’s Conference”, where he explains the importance of the themes selected of his novels (Idaho, n.d). Mengestu’s writing often delves into themes of identity, displacement, and the immigrant experience, drawing from his own background and observations of the world around him. These are mostly the major subjects depicts in his novels (MacArthur Foundation, n.d).

### **3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Biography:**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on September, 15th, 1977 in Enugu, an Igbo region part of Nigeria. She stands as one of the greatest African-Nigerian female authors. She is lucky to be issued from an educated family which encouraged her to write and to study at University of Nsukka. Adichie studied medicine for a year and received a scholarship to Drexel University in Philadelphia. (Sparknotes, n.d)

Adichie has many published works including novels, short stories and poetry. She got several degrees including masters in Creative Writings in 2003 and another in African History in 2008. At the age of 26, Adichie wrote her first novel *“Purple Hibiscus”* (2003) which won

the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and the Hurstone Wright Legacy Award, she won the Orange Prize for her best international seller novel "*Half of Yellow Sun*" (2006). (Chimamanda, n.d) Among of her best-known novel, *Americanah* (2013) won many awards including the United States National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction and many other literary awards. (Britanica, 2013) Furthermore, she has been invited to speak at various events and conferences in the world such as her participation in "The 2015 Pen World Voices Festival in New York City" and her famous conference in Ted Talk "*we should all Be Feminist*". (Jstor Daily, 2018) Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the others that do not stand for one theme in her works yet, she has a diversity of themes and new topics in all of her works. She explores the theme of race, identity, feminism, love, motherhood, marriage and more other topics. Adichie always succeed to amaze her readers by showing them her skills, abilities and creativity in transferring events.

#### **4. Summary of the two Novels:**

##### **a. Summary of *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007):**

*The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* tells the story of Sepha Stephanos, an Ethiopian immigrant struggling to make a life for himself in Washington, D.C. Sepha runs a small store that becomes a microcosm of the immigrant experience. The main character's life is marked by a deep sense of displacement and longing for his homeland. As Sepha navigates his daily life, he struggles with memories of his past in Ethiopia, and the political turmoil that forced him to flee his homeland at very young age. The story particularly delves into Sepha's daily struggles as he navigates the complexities of immigrant life in America, dealing with homeland, nostalgia, isolation, cultural differences, and the harsh realities of trying to achieve a better life. Amidst his challenges, Sepha builds relationships with the African immigrants Kenneth, Joseph and his neighbors. Through these relationships, Sepha finds comfort and moments of relief despite his feelings of loss and isolation. Moreover, it delves into Sepha's

routine is disrupted when Judith, an attractive white woman, moves into the neighborhood with her mixed-race daughter, Naomi. Sepha develops feelings for Judith, but their relationship is complicated by racial and cultural differences. As tensions rise in the neighborhood, Sepha forced to confront his own identity and sense of belonging. Ultimately, in the aftermath of the turmoil, Sepha reflects on his experiences and the challenges he has faced as an immigrant trying to find his place in America. Despite the struggles, he finds solace in the friendships with his neighbors and in the memories of his homeland. Sepha looks towards the future, embracing the beauty and complexities of his life in a world that is both harsh and hopeful.

**b. Summary of Adichie's *Americanah* (2013):**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's text, tells the story of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who migrates to the United States at an early age, leaving behind her family, friends and her boyfriend, Obinze in order to complete her postgraduate studies. The story is first set in Lagos, Nsukka in Nigeria and as the narrative progress; the events take place in some cities of the United States of America. Once arrived to America, Ifemelu sees herself as an outsider. She feels unease, not only for the reason that she is issued from a different culture, but also because of her skin color and her hair, which do not match with the American ideal type. She experiences many kinds of discrimination and struggles during her life in America. She becomes victim of racism because she is a Black immigrant with curly hair, who does not fit into the American beauty standards. She relentlessly tries to integrate to the American society and culture but fails because of her Nigerian identity and her lack of the American accent.

Because of racism, she could not get a job. She applies for many jobs and passes many interviews, but her status did not allow her to be accepted. She refuses with a justification claiming that she is not qualified and unprofessional. Her situation in the host country worsens because she does not succeed to be integrated. In addition to her professional

hardships, after her migration, the relationship with her boyfriend, Obinze was cut off. She tries to engage in relationships with other men but unfortunately they ended up with failure. However, the hardships did not stop her from writing. She creates a blog which become popular and where she writes everything she experiences in the United State. After several years, Ifemelu returns to Nigeria and reunites with her love.

### III. Results:

Our comparative study of Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* reveals parallel themes of immigrant experiences. Both stories delve into the lives of Black African immigrants facing challenges in foreign lands. The characters struggle with a longing for their homelands, seeking connection and reunion while navigating the challenges of adapting to new environments. This journey often leads to feelings of alienation and isolation unlike in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Sepha's forced departure from Ethiopia due to political unrest underscores the harsh reality of involuntary migration, highlighting the traumatic aspect of leaving one's homeland. Despite these differing circumstances, both characters struggle with the complexities of identity formation in their host countries. Correspondingly, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's pursuit of higher education propels her to the United States, symbolizing the pursuit of intellectual growth and opportunity.

In addition to themes of loneliness and isolation explored throughout both novels, depicting the alienation experienced by the two main characters as they navigate unfamiliar societal norms. This shared theme showcase the universal struggle of immigrants, regardless of the paths that led them to foreign shores. Moreover, the cultural clash that let do the concepts of "Hybridity" and "Mimicry" where both protagonists navigate between their roots and the American way of life, embodying a unique blend of their cultures, and their struggle with the expectations and stereotypes imposed upon them as a Black Africans in America. These clashes not only shape the characters' interactions but also contribute to their identity formation as they negotiate their cultural identities in the context of migration and adaptation. Thus, while the motivations for migration differ, the emotional and psychological challenges of adapting to a new culture, the formation of their identity by interaction with different cultures, growing personally and self-discovery forming an impactful echo between these two

compelling literary works remain profoundly similar. Throughout their narratives, Mengestu and Adichie provide poignant insights into the emotional and psychological challenges of migration and adaptation, emphasizing the resilience and strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

## **IV. Discussion:**

In this section of our research, we intend to analyze the two selected literary works of Dinaw Mengestu and Chimamanda Ngozi. First, in the course of chapter one, we shall explore, the varied challenges influencing the identities of black immigrants in their host countries, including cultural conflict, homeland, nostalgia, reunion, loneliness, and alienation, highlighting the similarities and differences in the immigrant experiences has portrayed. We will compare these themes in both novels, considering the settings, characters and their backgrounds, drawing on the concepts of Mimicry and Hybridity.

### **Chapter One: The Common Immigrant's Challenges in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*.**

#### **1. Homeland, Nostalgia and Reunion:**

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Sepha, the protagonist, experiences a profound sense of nostalgia for his homeland, Ethiopia. Having lived in the United States for many years, Sepha finds himself constantly reminiscing about his past life in Ethiopia. He longs for the sights, the laughter of his past and smells of his native country, which evoke memories of his childhood, family, and cultural traditions. Through his memories, he feels the warmth of his homeland country and the following passage is an illustration:

For at least the first two years that I was here, I was so busy passing my mother, brother, father, and friends in the aisles of grocery stores, in parks and restaurants that at times it hardly felt as if I had really left. I searched for familiarity wherever I went. I found it in the buildings and in the layout of the streets. I saw glimpses of home whenever I came across three or four roads that intersected at odd angles, in the squat glass office buildings caught in the sun's glare (Mengestu, 2007, p.155).

In this excerpt, Sepha reflects on his initial years in the new country. He enjoys the feeling of being surrounded by people from his homeland, encountering family and friends in everyday places. Despite being in a foreign land, the familiarity of certain places and

structures, like the layout of streets and buildings, momentarily transports him back home. Sepha finds connection in these familiar past images, making him feel as if he has not entirely left his homeland. These memories are like a bridge, connecting his past life in Ethiopia, to his present one in Washington, D.C. Even though he is far away, his heart is still in Ethiopia. It captures his struggle to reconcile his past life with the new, unfamiliar environment. Sepha's sentiment captures a complex emotional journey, which appears through his reflections: "With our menial jobs and cramped apartment, it's impossible not to want to look back sometimes and pretend there was once a better world, one where husbands were faithful, children were obedient, and life was easy and wonderful" (P. 108). He reflects on the challenges of his current life in America as an immigrant. He expresses a common sentiment among immigrants, especially those facing difficult circumstances. Sepha longs for an idealized past, a nostalgic vision of his homeland or an imagined better world where life is simple and comfortable, where relationships are harmonious, and hardships do not exist. This longing reflects on his nostalgia experience, revealing how immigrants often struggle with the contrast between their idealized memories of home and the challenges of their present reality. Sepha's words highlight his emotional relationship to his homeland, even among the difficulties of his immigrant life. The return through imagination becomes for him a source of both comfort and longing.

Furthermore, Sepha's insistence on preserving his native language emerges as a crucial element of his homeland nostalgia in the novel. Sepha holds onto his Ethiopian identity by speaking his native Amharic language. Characters, like Sepha, continue to speak their native language at home, it ensures relationship's strength to Ethiopia. This practice becomes a cherished tradition, a way of maintaining a deep connection to the homeland even after living for a long time in a foreign land. Such an experience is expressed in what follows: "Even now, after nearly two decades in America, I continue to refer to him respectfully as

Gashe” (P.89). Sepha refers to his uncle Berhane as “Gashe” which is an honorific title used in Ethiopian culture to show respect to an older person or someone of authority. By continuing to use the title “Gashe” for someone even after living in America for almost twenty years, this shows the way he holds on to his home country’s customs and language, even in a foreign land. This act highlights the enduring power of cultural identity and the ways in which language can serve as a link to one’s homeland and sense of belonging. Sepha keeps his cultural relationship strong. It is like a way of bringing a piece of Ethiopia with him to America, showcases his connection to his homeland. In addition to his cultural gestures, that represents a part of Sepha’s nostalgia experience, reflecting the preservation of his Ethiopian cultural norms in a foreign land as Joseph says to Sepha:

That’s my favorite thing about you Ethiopians,” he says. “You kiss each other on the cheeks all the time. It takes you hours to say hello and goodbye because you’re constantly kissing each other. Kiss. Kiss. Kiss (P.15)

The act of kissing on the cheeks is a tradition deeply rooted in Ethiopian social interactions. By continuing this practice in the United States, Sepha keeps his cultural heritage alive. This simple gesture serves as tangible reminders of his homeland and provides a sense of comfort and continuity amidst the challenges of living in a new country. The journey is not just about physical travel; it is about keeping the essence of one’s home alive, even in a new and distant place. Speaking one’s native language not only preserves the cultural heritage but also supports a sense of identity and belonging within the families as Sepha says: “So far, we’ve named more than thirty different coups in Africa. It’s become a game with us. Name a dictator and then guess the year and country. We’ve been playing the game for over a year now” (P.16). In this passage, the characters engage in a game where they name African dictators and try to guess the year and country of each coup. This game, even it is a simple pastime, reflects a deeper connection to their African roots and experiences, embodies the theme of nostalgia by mentioning political events and leaders from their homeland, these

characters are mentally returning to Africa, even though they are physically distant. The game becomes a way for them to reinforce their homeland nostalgia, it shows that it is not limited to personal memories; it also includes collective memory of the political struggles and events in their home countries. Through this game, the characters maintain a strong link to their African heritage, emphasizes the influence of their homeland on their identities, even when living in a foreign context.

In overall, Sepha's nostalgia is not just for a place but also for a sense of belonging and cultural identity that he feels disconnected from in his adopted country. His emotional journey of return is essential because it helps him keep his Ethiopian traditions and stories alive, even when he is far and living in a different country. Therefore, though Sepha's story is personal, it also shows how many people, no matter where they are from, can feel a deep connection to their homeland. Mengestu's book helps us understand that homeland nostalgia is powerful feeling inside, which links us to our roots and shaping who we are.

As far as *Homeland and Reunion* are two important sections in the novel, that focuses on the protagonists' Ifemelu's return to Nigeria after several years in the United States. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's life experience as a Nigerian woman, who moved to the United States to continue her studies in the University of Philadelphia; leaves behind her family, friends and her love Obinze. While living in America she faces several challenges and complexities such as racism, alienation, discrimination, loneliness and isolation. These challenges do not stop her developing, discovering, and to immerse herself in the American culture and adopting certain mannerism.

However, after several years in America, she ultimately decided to return to Nigeria, to go back to her true self and essence. She wanted to see her family; hoping to reunite with her first love Obinze and to work on a magazine in Lagos, leaving behind her life in America

that she has struggled for. Everyone was shocked by her decision to return to Nigeria and take it as a joke, which adds another layer to her identity as a “Been-To”. Her Aunt Ujo says: “you are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn’t pay that much” (Adichie, 2013, p.20), Aunt Ujo believes that Ifemelu has better opportunities in America, except her friend Ranyinudo who sees her return as normal. She says: “Lagos is now full of American returnees, so you better come back and join them”. (Ibid. p.20)

Through the novel, and because of her return to Nigeria Ifemelu considers as a “Been-To” which means an African term that represents African individuals who migrate abroad in general and the United States in particular, for the purpose of education or employment and have returned to their home country. (Postcolonial Web, n.d). Zenaye indicates it in the following conversation:

“You people must be discussing the next Been-to meeting”

“What’s that? Ifemelu asked

“Doris talks about them all the time, but she can’t invite me because it is only for people who have come from abroad (Adichie, 2013, p.393)

Ifemelu has invited and already joined the Nigeropolitan club which is a group of returnees some from England and some from the United States. These meetings may provide a platform for discussing their experiences, sharing stories, and connecting with others who have traveled abroad. However, the return of the “Been-To” is not easy. For instance, once Ifemelu comes back to Nigeria, she faces a sense of disconnection and a struggle to reintegrate into her home country. Adichie portrays this through Ifemelu’s observations of the changes that have occurred in Nigeria during her absence. Ifemelu says:

One morning, a man’s body lay on Awolowo Road. Another morning, the Island flooded and cars became gasping boats. Here, she felt, anything could happen, a ripe tomato could burst out of solid stone. And so she had the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. (P.373)

This excerpt highlights the complex experience of the character as being a “Been-To” and the dissonance that can arise when one returns to their home country after living abroad.

**a. Alienation:**

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the author explores the profound theme of alienation experienced by the protagonist, Sepha Stephanos with his African friends Kenneth and Joseph. He is culturally different from his neighbors, which creates a sense of alienation as he struggles to find common ground. His situation adds another layer of alienation, as he struggles with belonging to two different worlds but not entirely fitting into either. It reflects Sepha’s deep sense of displacement and disconnection from both countries as the excerpt shows it:

So then, you hate America today? “Kenneth says. He smiles a half smile. He pours a little scotch into a Styrofoam cup he stole from his office and hands it to me. I know that if I let him, he would pull from his pocket the missing \$26.16 and slide it into the cash register. Anything to make me feel better. “with all my heart,” I say to him (P.14)

Sepha’s response, “With all my heart”, when he has been asked if he hates America, covers the profound sense of alienation he experiences. Living in Washington, D.C., Sepha struggles with cultural disconnection and racial isolation. The above citation also illustrates the intense emotional burden he carries, highlights his struggle to find acceptance in a society where he feels like an outsider. Sepha’s journey becomes a poignant exploration of the human condition, emphasizing the complexities of identity and the enduring impact of alienation on an individual’s sense of belonging.

Through Sepha’s story, Mengestu masterfully has portrayed the heartbreaking reality of those who yearn for connection but find themselves perpetually on the fringe of society. Furthermore, He affirms: “How long did it take for me to understand that I was never going to return?” (P.156). Sepha’s realization that he would never return to his home country reflects a deep sense of disconnection and estrangement. This awareness of being permanently

separated from his homeland contributes to his feeling of alienation, emphasizes his sense of being an outsider in the new country where he resides. The quote highlights the emotional distance and the profound sense of not belonging, which are core aspects of the theme of alienation. Moreover, Sepha illustrates his sense of alienation by saying:

I stood up from my bench across front Legan circle. I had settled on the woman walking closest to me. As soon as the woman saw me standing up, they banded together. It was a small, protective act, just enough to make me sick of myself. (P.124)

The excerpt reveals that women's defensive reaction emphasizes Sepha's outsider status and his difficulty in forming connections, his feeling of being sick of himself after this incident indicates the emotional toll of his continuous experiences of rejection and isolation. Sepha's emotional response highlights his alienation, emphasizes his feeling of being disconnected and alienated from the community. However, Sepha's alienation is not merely a physical separation from his homeland but a profound emotional disconnect from the society he resides in. The struggle to bridge the gap between cultures, the pain of unfulfilled connections, and the silent battles fought within oneself. His alienation speaks about the universal longing for acceptance and understanding.

Life abroad is the feeling of alienation, which is an outcome of the immigrant journey. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu experiences a sense of alienation both in America and even after her return to Nigeria. Through Ifemelu daily life, Adichie portrays the profound sense of alienation as an immigrant woman feels in her new environment. She feels like she does not quite fit in when her first move to America, she notices that people treated her differently because of her race, which is something new for her, and never happened in Nigeria, she feels like an 'outsider' who does not quite belong to the milieu in which she lives. She says: "Great! Wonderful to talk to you! You'll hear from me soon [...] 'I'm sorry Ngozi', she said, 'but we decided to hire a more qualified person. Good Luck!'" (Adichie, p.145,146). This citation shows clearly how Ifemelu is treated as an incapable and unqualified woman.

Furthermore, while living in the United States, Ifemelu experiences racism, discrimination and alienation in many different forms because of the color of her skin and her

different identity. Adichie, through Ifemelu, portrays how being a black woman in a western country that is so rough and hard to handle, either because of their skin color, identity or being a woman. Race that Ifemelu faces in America is one of the reasons that she has alienated from herself and from the American society. In America notices that her skin color makes her inferior than ever before. She says:

The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black I only became Black when I came to America (P.288).

She is not aware of racism until she arrives to America, such discrimination forces her to struggle everyday with herself in order to accept her hair and her dark skin color. Also, she is used to know that the word 'fat' is a bad word in America, and has to banish it. Unfortunately, one day in a supermarket a man in line behind her says: "Fat people don't need to be eating that shit," as she paid for her giant bag of Tostitos" (P.13). These citations show racism that Ifemelu faces makes her feel a sense of alienation forcing her to feel rejected by the American host country.

However, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria leaves her feeling disconnected and alienated too. This is primarily due to the changes both in her personal life and in Nigerian society during her absence. After living in the United States for several years, Ifemelu undergoes a cultural and emotional transformation; she becomes accustomed to American ways of life, different societal norms and attitudes, which are dissimilar from her home country. Consequently, when she returned to Nigeria, Ifemelu finds it challenging to readjust to the Nigerian way of life; she finds it difficult, for instance, to accept the Nigeria's political corruption, social injustices, and economic disparities. Her newfound awareness makes it difficult for her to overlook the issue prevalent in her country, creates a divide between her and her fellow Nigerians who may not have the same level of consciousness. The narrator says it in the following excerpt:

“I’d forgotten that Lagos is so expensive. I can’t believe how much money the Nigerian wealthy spend”  
“Most of them are thieves or beggars.”  
She laughed. “Thieves or beggars”  
“It’s true. And they don’t just spend a lot, they expect to spend a lot” (P.417)

This dialogue is between Ifemelu and Obinze in a restaurant after meeting each other and while discussing how Nigerian people become corrupted illustrate Ifemelu’s non acceptance of the Nigerian established order. She criticizes how the authorities gather money even through begging or stealing. The important thing is to become rich and spend a lot of money. Also, Ifemelu experiences a sense of disconnection from her family, friends and surrounding. Obinze asks her if she is still in contact with her old friends, she says: “With Ranyinudo, yes. And Priye. The others are now people who used to be my friends. Kind of like you and Emenike” (P.422). This sense of alienation compounds by the fact that Ifemelu now sees Nigeria from different perspectives, noticing its flaws, corruption and social inequalities.

#### **b. Loneliness and Isolation:**

The next common point between the two narratives is the feeling of isolation, which is recurrent in the two novels. In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* through Sepha, the protagonist, who experiences a profound sense of isolation as he navigates his life in America. His isolation is not just geographical but also emotional and cultural. Living in an African-American neighborhood, Sepha finds himself isolated due to his immigrant status and different cultural background. Thus, he struggles to connect with his neighbors and feels a deep sense of loneliness despite being surrounded by people. He claims:

I rarely left the apartment, nor did I want to. Any connection, whether it was to a person, building, or time of day, would have been deceitful, and so I avoided making eye contact with people I didn't know, and tried to deny myself even the simplest of pleasure. (Mengestu, p.126)

It can be understood from this passage that Sepha’s isolation is both physical and emotional. Physically, he isolates himself from the outside world; he rarely leaves his apartment, and

avoids connections with others. Emotionally, his seclusion is due to his traumatic past, especially the political unrest in Ethiopia, which haunts him day and night.

Moreover, Sepha's isolation is also a result of his experience as he finds it challenging to relate to others who have not shared his unique cultural journey. His separation becomes a defense mechanism with which he defends himself from potential pain but also reinforcing his sense of disconnection. He feels isolated and disconnected, finding it hard to engage with the outside world. His struggle to connect with people mirrors the challenges many immigrants face. Sepha's isolation highlights the emotional difficulties of living in a new country, as expressed in what follows: "There's a solitude and isolation that come with knowing that out of everyone you had begun your journey with, only you and few faces across the aisle are left" (P.105). This excerpt reveals the extent to which "solitude and isolation" convey a profound sense of being alone and disconnected. The realization that only a few faces remain from the people Sepha initially started his journey with underscores his sense of abandonment and separation from the community. It also captures the profound loneliness and emotional distance experienced by Sepha, emphasizing the theme of isolation that permeates the novel.

Although isolation has often regarded as undesirable, Sepha prefers solitude, finding comfort in being alone, as he states: "I never said it was because all I wanted...was to read quietly, and alone, for as much of the day as possible". (P.44). From this passage, we understand that Sepha's desire to read quietly and alone becomes a relief. The main character seeks solitude reading underscores his emotional distance from the community around him. His Choice to spend his time in solitary reading underscores his emotional distance from the community around him. His inclination to seek solace in books rather than engaging with people reflects his isolation and highlights his struggle to connect with others; it also emphasizes his sense of being disconnected from others. Sepha's isolation serves as a

reflection of the complexities of the immigrant experience. Despite being surrounded by people, he remains emotionally distant, grappling with a profound sense of loneliness and detachment.

However, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu faces difficulties in integrating into the “New Nigeria” upon her return. It portrays various changes that occurred in Nigeria during Ifemelu’s absence. Nigeria undergoes significant social and economic growth and development, technology and connectivity with the access to the internet, smart phones, and social media. This transforms communication and connectivity within Nigerian society. Besides, changes of fashion and style. The novel portrays Nigeria’s persistent issues with corruption such as; bribery, nepotism and social economic inequality. These changes increase Ifemelu’s feeling of loneliness and isolation upon her return to Nigeria after spending more than ten years in America. She struggles in fitting back into Nigerian society.

Adichie portrays Ifemelu experiences through various instances of loneliness and isolation during her time in Nigeria. The novel explores the profound impact that loneliness can have on an individual’s sense of belonging, identity and connections with others. She feels a sense of loneliness and disconnect in Nigeria due to her experiences abroad in the United States, and the changes, which happened in her country, she says:

When she left home, only the wealthy had cell phones, all the numbers started with 090, and girls wanted to date 090 men. Now, her hair braider had a cell phone, the plantain seller tending a blackend grill had a cell phone (Adichie, P.373)

This citation shows the economic growth happens in Nigeria, in the past, it was rare to have smart phones except for rich people, but now everything has changed, phones are available for everyone and they can have more than one cell phone. Also, Ifemelu finds it difficult to reconnect with old friends and feels like an outsider due to her changed point of view and experiences. She says: “people changed, sometimes they changed too much” (P.387). She

notices how her friends changes and do not ask about her experiences during her life in America. She says:

During reunions with old friends, the subject of marriage came up, a waspish tone in the voices of the unmarried, a smugness in those of the married. Ifemelu wanted to talk about the past, about the teachers they had mocked and the boys they had liked, but marriage was always the preferred topic-whose husband was a dog, who was on a desperate prowl, posting too many dressed-up pictures of herself on Facebook, whose man had disappointed her after four years and left her to marry a small girl he could control. (P.386)

This citation reveals that, Ifemelu is likely feeling a sense of loneliness and disconnect from her friends. The repeated focus on marriage during their reunions suggests that her friends undergo significant changes in their priorities and interests since she left for the United States. The fact that they do not show curiosity or interest in Ifemelu's experiences in America, this highlights the isolating effect on her. It also implies that Ifemelu's friends are more concerned with discussing marital issues rather than engaging with her personal growth and experiences, which deepens her sense of loneliness. Ifemelu then feels like an outsider or a 'returnee' in Nigeria, because of the changes and the feeling of loneliness. It appears that she does not belong to Nigeria anymore. Her friend Ranyinudo calls her 'returnee' and 'Americanah'. She expresses her disillusionment when says: "I don't have energy for you returnees, please" (P.395). She also makes the feeling of nostalgia apparent to her old friends and the old Nigeria. She says:

There was, also, a strained nostalgia in those reunions, some in Ranyinudo's flat, some in hers, some in restaurants, because she struggled to find, in these adult women, some remnants from her past that were often no longer there". (P.386)

Her time spent in the United States shapes her identity in significant ways. Her return to Nigeria brings about a loss of identity as she struggles with the complexities of belonging to two different cultures. This loss increases her feelings of loneliness and widens lack of connection with those around her.

### c. Cultural Clash:

Cultural clash in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* signifies the clash of Sepha's Ethiopian cultural identity with the American way of life. As an immigrant, Sepha experiences a profound clash between his memories of Ethiopia and the cultural norms in his new surroundings. The clash manifests in various ways; in the way he interacts with neighbors, in his attempts to preserve Ethiopian traditions while adapting to American culture, and in the disconnection he feels between the two worlds. The following excerpt illustrates the point:

Christmas was still three weeks away in Ethiopia. I wouldn't receive a call from my mother until then. Normally by that point, any possible nostalgia for the holiday would have long since passed. It had been easy to continue living on the Ethiopian calendar at first. I could still remember that Christmas fell twice a year, once in December and again in January, but as the years accumulated, it became harder and harder to remember that there were two halves to the narrative. Last year, I didn't remember to call home until it was already late into the evening. (P.138)

The above extract reflects that, despite living in the United States, Sepha still marks time of Christmas according to the Ethiopian calendar. His celebration of this special event showcases his enduring connection to his homeland. It reveals his struggle to reconcile the two holiday seasons, one in December and another in January while it also mirrors the internal conflict faced by many immigrants. This clash of calendars embodies the ongoing tension between adapting to a new culture and preserving one's cultural roots (been-to).

Sepha's difficulty in remembering to call home signifies the challenges of maintaining familial and cultural ties from a distance. His nostalgia for the Ethiopian holiday traditions, for example, enhance the deep emotional impact of his experience illustrating how immigrants like Sepha, struggle with a sense of displacement and the longing for home. It also illustrates the complex nature of the immigrant experience. Moreover, it shows how: "Our memories", Joseph says, "are like a river cut off from the ocean with time they will

slowly dry out in the sun and so we drink and drink and drink and we never have our fill” (P.18).

Based on the above citation, the image of the river drying out in the sun signifies the gradual fading of memories over time; it stands as a symbol for the inevitability of forgetting one’s past. The act of drinking without ever having their fill symbolizes the constant search for a sense of belonging and the attempt to extinguish the emotional thirst caused by displacement and alienation. This metaphor emphasizes the enduring struggle faced by immigrants, caught between their past and their present, leading to a sense of cultural clash. The yearning for their homeland and the clash between their memories and the reality of their new environment create a profound sense of alienation and displacement, which highlight the complexities of the immigrant experience and his status of a “been to”.

This clash serves as a powerful depiction of the complexities faced by immigrants who, while rooted in their homeland’s culture, must navigate the unfamiliar terrain of a different culture. It focuses the ongoing struggle to reconcile their heritage with the demands and expectations of their new environment, highlights the challenges inherent in the immigrant experience and adding depth to the exploration of the common immigrants complexities in the novel. However, as the story unfolds, these clashes evolve into a beautiful tapestry of cultural “Hybridity”. Through shared experiences and mutual understanding, characters find common ground, creating a unique blend of cultures, which illustrates how immigrants adapt and integrate aspects of their heritage into the fabric of their new lives.

On a particular way, in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, cultural “Hybridity” is a means of survival and adaptation for immigrants in a foreign land (ScienceDirect, n.d). Thus, Sepha and Judith embody cultural “Hybridity” in the novel. One notable

interaction occurs when Judith invites Sepha for dinner, indicating her efforts to limit cultural gaps and connect with her new neighbors. He says:

The first time Judith invited me over for dinner, she had Naomi slip a note into my mailbox.  
Dear Mr. Stephanos,  
My mother and I would like to invite you to our house for dinner. On November 28. We  
would be very happy if you could come  
Judith and Naomi (P.51)

Hence, Judith and Naomi express clearly their interest in getting to know him better and potentially forming a deeper relationship. The event marks a pivotal moment in the novel as Sepha begins to have some connections with his neighbors and gradually becomes more intertwined with their lives, reflects the theme of community and belonging. He accepts the invitation and engages in conversations with Judith and shares stories, evolving his sense of connection to her and the broader American community, helping him feel less isolated in his new environment. Judith addresses Sepha stating: “You’re the first dinner guest we’ve had in our new house” (P.55).

By considering Sepha as the first dinner guest in their new home, Judith shows that she values their relationship and sees her guest as someone close enough to share this milestone with. It is a way of extending hospitality and building a deeper connection with him. This moment illustrates the evolving relationships and connections that Sepha forms as he becomes more integrated into the lives of those around him; it also illustrates his desire of belonging to an American community. Then, through his interactions, Sepha gains insights into American culture and society; he succeeds to find someone with whom he can share his experiences as an immigrant.

More importantly, Sepha’s life represents a fusion of Ethiopian heritage and American experiences. He challenges the tension between preserving his Ethiopian identity and adapting to American culture. His interactions with the neighborhood and his customers show his attempt to bridge the gap between these two worlds. Particularly, Sepha’s friendships with

Judith and other American neighbors symbolize the merging of his new cultural identity, demonstrates the potential for understanding and connection across cultures. Judith's openness to engage with people from diverse backgrounds is apparent in the way she embraces Sepha and his Ethiopian culture, inviting him to read and enjoy drinks together. He says:

“She opened the door with a “Surprise,” and then quickly went to work setting out the cups and drinks on the counter. “What’s the occasion?” I asked her.  
“No occasion,” she said.  
“But I figured if we were going to read, there was no reason why we couldn’t do it properly” (P.103).

Judith's actions and response reinforces her desire to create a meaningful and comfortable environment for Sepha. When she opens the door with a ‘Surprise’ and begins setting out cups and drinks for them, it indicates that she has planned something special for their reading time together. Moreover, she shows that this gathering is not tied to a specific event or celebration. Her actions reveal that she values the time they spend together and wants to make it enjoyable and meaningful. It is an example of cultural “Hybridity” that demonstrates how characters in the novel shape their new identities and connections in a multicultural setting. Their friendship and the cultural exchanges they share exemplify the possibility of connections and understanding between people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The clash is not about customs; it delves into the clash of expectations, dreams, and deeply ingrained beliefs. Through these clashes, the novel captures the bittersweet reality of cultural adaptation. Additionally, to the concept of “Mimicry” which is evident in the novel. It involves the broader Ethiopian community, and highlights their collective efforts to assimilate into Afro-American culture and adopt American customs. He claims: “In the summertime we slept on Ethiopian, they’re all become American” (P.102). It reflects on the cultural transformation of the Ethiopian community in their new American environment, it has assimilated into Afro-American culture, adopting new customs and lifestyles. Sepha expresses

a sense of loss and change within the community, the passage illustrates how “Mimicry” shapes the immigrant experience through his adaptation to the dominant society’s way of life. “Hybridity”, we deduce that the blending of cultures is evident as characters like Sepha find themselves overlapping the line between their Ethiopian roots and American surroundings. While Sepha does not overtly mimic American culture, his interactions and adaptations subtly reflect the process of cultural “Hybridity”.

So, while both novels explore cultural clash, the specific themes within the clash differ based on the characters’ backgrounds and the central points of each story in Adichie’s novel, Ifemelu is exposed to two cultures, which led her to struggle with race, complexities and challenges of identity. She faces discrimination, isolation and alienation as a Black woman, and has to navigate her identity in order to adapt to the cultural norms of the country she lives in, through cultural adaptation. Ifemelu is completely unfamiliar with American culture and goes through a process of adapting and learning to navigate the cultural differences. For instance, on her first arrival to America, she struggles to understand the nuances of American culture. As a black woman immigrant, Ifemelu experiences a profound clash between her Nigerian culture and the cultural norms of the American culture. However, overtime, she learns to adapt to these cultural differences and even begins to adapt herself to her new environment. This attempt by Ifemelu to adapt to a different cultural context can be understood according to Homi k.Bhabha’s concepts of “Mimicry” and “Hybridity”.

According to Bhabha, ‘Mimicry’ is a strategy or a process used by the colonized people to imitate or ‘mimic’ the colonizers norms in order to be accepted. Following this process, Ifemelu starts imitating the American accent when she worked as a babysitter to her Aunt Uju son’s Dike. Sometimes Ifemelu speaks with him Igbo, but her Aunt Uju always reminds her to not speak Igbo with Dike. She says: “please don’t speak Igbo to him ... two

languages will confuse him”. (P. 114). So she mimics the American accent when she talkss to her cousin Dike. Also, her old Nigerian friend Ginika helps her mimicking the American accent by giving her advice and spending most of the time together; she becomes like a teacher to her. Besides, it takes her almost one year to mimic the American accent and learn certain aspects of American culture. She says: “And in the following weeks, as autumn’s coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent”. (P.136). One day, an American Telemaker calls her and gives her a compliment: “Wow, cool, you sound totally American.... Thank you” (P.178). This citation shows that Ifemelu successfully has mimicked the American accent.

Additionally, to the concept of “Hybridity” which refers to the cultural mixing and the way cultural identity constantly evolves and changes as people move between different cultures and contexts is closely relevant to Ifemelu experiences as an immigrant. “Hybridity” is displayed in the way she constructs her new identity as a Nigerian immigrant in America. Thus, the relationship between Ifemelu and Curt, an attractive American man, can be seen as embodying cultural blending. Also, it indicates the way she negotiates the complexities and nuances of the distinct cultural identities while enjoying her romantic relationship. (Eduzaurus, n.d)

Their relationship is so good even the differences of identity and skin color. She says: “She was Curt’s girlfriend a role she slipped into as a favorite, flattering dress” (P.198). Her relationship with an American makes Ifemelu free and helps her to do whatever she wants. She can laugh, dream, in other word she can be herself as this excerpt expresses it clearly:

She became in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares, a woman running in the rain with the taste of sun-warmed strawberries in her mouth. “A drink” became a part of the architecture of her life, mojitos and martinis, dry whites and fruity reds. She went hiking with him, kayaking, camping near his family’s vacation home, all things she would never have imagined herself doing before. (P.197)

Their relationship showcases the bleeding of cultures as they incorporate elements from both Nigerian and American cultures into their lives. They negotiate their identities and find common ground, reflecting the concept of cultural “Hybridity”.

Upon her return, she feels like an outsider in Nigeria and struggles to reconcile her Nigerian identity with the American influences she acquires. In Nigeria, her friends laugh and mock her American accent. For instance, her friend Ranyinudo calls her: “Americanah! Ranyinudo teased her often. “You are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americanah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining!” (P.373). Therefore, Ifemelu finds herself caught between two worlds. In Nigeria, she encounters significant cultural conflicts, particularly related to language and social norms. One of the most noticeable differences is the way people use language. In America, she has got a different style of English, and now back in Nigeria, she finds herself struggling to fit in linguistically. Ifemelu’s friend Doris asks:

“Don’t you just hate it how people say ‘I’m pressed’ or ‘I want to ease myself’ when they want to go to the bathroom?” Doris asked.  
Ifemelu laughed. “I know!”  
“I guess ‘bathroom’ is very American. But there’s ‘toilet,’ ‘restroom,’ ‘the ladies.’”  
“I never liked ‘the ladies.’ I like ‘toilet.’”  
“Me too!” Doris said. “And don’t you just hate it when people here use ‘on’ as a verb? On the light!”  
“You know what I can’t stand? When people say ‘take’ instead of ‘drink.’ I will take wine. I don’t take beer.”  
“Oh God, I know!” (Pp.392, 393)

Besides, Ifemelu experiences a form of reverse culture shock when she returns to Nigeria. She becomes accustomed to American customs and practices, so she feels out of place or disconnected from her Nigerian identity. Such a situation can be seen through her behaviors and how she sees things from American eyes. She struggles to find her real identity because she is neither real American nor real African. So she tries and did her best to stop acting like an American and be really African. This can be seen through her friend Ranyinudo when she

says: “you are no longer behaving like an Americanah! and despite herself, Ifemelu felt pleased to hear this (P.383).

However, she faces stereotypes and preconceptions from both Americans and Nigerians. While in America, she is considered as an ‘outsider’, unqualified and incapable woman; she suffers from a similar stereotype when regaining her Nigerian background. Some Nigerians view her as ‘foreign’, ‘returnee’ and ‘Americanah’ due to her time spent in the United States. These cultural clashes highlight the complexities and adjustment that Ifemelu goes through as she returns to Nigeria and tries to reconcile her experiences abroad with her home country.

To sum up our comparison, we can say that, in both *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*, the protagonists complexities takes center stage, illustrating both Ifemelu and Sepha, struggles with the challenges of homeland nostalgia and reunion, alienation, isolation, and cultural clash in their adopted country in a diverse ways. These common complexities explore their status as outsiders, navigating the unfamiliar territories of America and Europe delving into identity, belonging, and the complexities of adapting to new environments while preserving elements of one’s heritage. Sepha’s tale in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* centers on an Ethiopian immigrant trying to find his place in a poor neighborhood in Washington, D.C. On the other hand, Ifemelu’s story in *Americanah* focuses on her journey as a Nigerian Woman in America; it highlights the complexities of race and identity in the United States, both novels showcases immigrant struggles trying to reconcile their past with their present, encloses the themes of “Mimicry” and “Hybridity” as they adapt to new cultures while retaining elements of their heritage.

Despite these shared themes, both novels highlight their diverse experiences, because. Sepha in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is shaped by struggles with his Ethiopian

heritage and a sense of displacement in changing neighborhood in Washington, D.C. While, Ifemelu's story in *Americanah*; has shaped by her experiences as a highly educated Nigerian woman, navigating race and identity in the United States. Moreover, Sepha's struggle has tied to his immigrant status in his community. Whereas, Ifemelu's alienation and cultural clash are primarily related to race Sepha's struggle has tied to his immigrant status in his community.

## **Chapter Two: The Evolution of Identity in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*:**

This chapter deals with identity formation, which refers to how one's sense of self and belonging can change and develop over time. Such a progress can be influenced by various factors like cultural technology, social, and personal efforts for integration (ISP Fostering, n.d). It can also involve self-discovery, personal growth and adapting to new experiences and perspectives (Ibid). So, how is the process of identity transformation coming to sign in the two texts? To what extent can it be compared?

### **1. Identity Formation in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*:**

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, Sepha's identity formation unfolds as he struggles with the complexities of being an Ethiopian immigrant in the United States. Sepha's character is shaped by his memories of Ethiopia. These memories anchor Sepha's sense of self and provide a link to his cultural heritage. His interactions with his neighbors, including Judith and her daughter Naomi, further shape his identity as he seeks connection and belonging in his new surroundings. The subsequent passage illustrates how Sepha is so attached to Naomi willing to change himself:

This place is filthy," Naomi said. And while I may have been hurt just slightly by her judgment, I also wanted to make it better for her so I could be rewarded with a hundred mornings and afternoons just like this one".(P.99).

Naomi's comment about the place being filthy reflects her initial judgment of the surroundings. Sepha's reaction, on the other hand, shows his desire to improve the environment for Naomi's sake. He wants to create a better space for her, hoping that this effort will lead to more shared moments like the one they are experiencing.

Consequently, In terms of identity formation, this above quote highlights Sepha's willingness to adapt and change for maintaining his relationship with his American friends.

His actions suggest a shift in his sense of self, as he would like to make efforts to improve his surroundings and redefine his identity in the context in his relation to Naomi. It also shows his desire for growth and transformation, which can be an important aspect of his evolving identity.

Additionally, Sepha's identity formation and the concept of "Hybridity" help him to build meaningful connections in his new environment. It contributes to the merging of cultures and the evolution of his identity beyond the boundaries of his Ethiopian heritage as he affirms:

There's something physical that changes with a person's appearance when they suddenly open up to you. For Judith, that change occurred almost exclusively in her eyes, which generally never rested for too long on any one person or objects, unless it was Naomi. Now, though, she met my eyes with hers and did not back down. (P.119)

This passage suggests a significant shift in Judith's behavior and attitude towards Sepha. The change in her eyes, from restlessness to focus attention, indicates a newfound openness and connection between them. The moments spent together stand for mutual understanding and acceptance. So, their friendship reflects on the blending of cultures and the potential for genuine connections, which transcend cultural differences.

Therefore, "Hybridity" can include not only people but also places, traditions, languages, and other cultural aspects as Sepha expresses it: "There was a park in Addis that looked just Logan circle does from a distance, with a few minor adjustments. That was the other reason I moved into this neighborhood". (P.192). In this context, Sepha's observation about the park in Addis resembling Logan Circle is an illustration; he mentally compare two different places and reflects the hybrid nature of his identity. The familiarity he finds in the park mirrors his cultural roots, which emphasizes his Ethiopian identity. It also underlines the blending of his Ethiopian heritage with his current environment, creating a unique cultural

fusion. Furthermore, Naomi, who likely represents a different cultural background, becomes a significant part of Sepha's life in America. The excerpt proves the point:

“She closed by saying that she hoped I wasn't lonely without her. I had always wondered if she was perceptive enough to know how far her presence went towards filling my days. I was relieved to find that she was. She saved the best sentence for last”. She wrote them as a couplet:

“There are many nice people here, but none as nice as you”

“Please write me back, because that's what friends are supposed to do”. (P.191)

The passage reveals perceptive understanding of his loneliness and the effort to comfort him through the letter highlight her concern with his experiences as an immigrant, it also bridges the gap between their different cultural backgrounds. The conversation, at the end, emphasizes the bond they share, the sense of belonging and acceptance that transcends cultural differences. It symbolizes the hybrid identity that immigrants often develop, blending elements from their native culture with the new culture they find themselves in. In this context, it illustrates how relationships with others, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, which can contribute to one's sense of identity and belonging in a foreign land.

Moreover, the form of “Mimicry” highlights the fluid nature of identity, where individuals like Sepha adapt to new environments while preserving elements of their heritage as the following quotation shows it:

It was Kenneth's suggestion that I put a deli counter inside of the store

“Americans love sandwiches”, he said confidently.

I paid for it with a credit card offer that came in the mail. I ordered the best meat that I couldn't afford and arranged it neatly behind the glass case. I bought a stand-alone chalkboard sign that I placed in front of the store. For the first time, I used the name that Joseph had given me

Logan's market

Now offering freshly made Sandwiches to order. (P.170)

This passage reveals that Sepha mimics American eating habits by introducing sandwiches, a popular American food, in his store. This act of mimicking reflects his adaptation to the culture of his new home; it also stands for a form of cultural assimilation. Sepha's use of the name “Logan's Market” and offering sandwiches to fit to American taste prove his attempt to

integrate and connect with his American customers. Hence, his will to be integrated allows him to evolve his identity, which includes elements from both his homeland and the host country.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, identity formation is displaced through the experience of the main characters as they try to accept different cultures. As Ifemelu leads her life in America, she undergoes a significant transformation in her understanding of race, culture. She experiences an important change in her own identity as a Nigerian immigrant. Her experiences prompt to critically examine her own beliefs and transform her fixed identity. Initially, Ifemelu strongly identifies herself as Nigerian, embraces her cultural heritage by maintaining a sense of belonging to her homeland. However, as she immerses herself in American culture, she starts adapting herself to some aspects of the American way of life by altering her accent, changing her appearance and even dating outside her Nigerian community.

In the first chapter of *Americanah*, Ifemelu goes to Trenton to braid her hair in order to go back to Nigeria as she says: "So here she was, on a day filled with the opulence of summer, about to braid her hair for the journey home". (P.15). We understand from her statement that she changes her hair while living in America. This change prompts her to adapt and find new ways to alter her identity in this unfamiliar setting. Also, her will for change is caused by the fact that, most of the time; she could not get a job as her employers refuse to employ women wearing braids as she affirms: "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interviews. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional". (P.123). The quote highlights racism and the way of thinking of Americans who judge people by their physical appearance, skin color, accent, and hair. In their eyes, braiding one's hair highlights the idea of unprofessional and unqualified women. Moreover, Ifemelu dates white men but it always ends up with breaks up.

She writes on her blog: “So, still a bit sad about the breakup with The Hot White Ex, not into the bar scene, and so I signed up for online dating” (P.303).

However, a special moment in her identity transformation occurs when she starts her blog discussing race and discrimination, which becomes highly popular. Through her blog, Ifemelu delves into her racial problems, exploring how identity has shaped by society and her own experiences, through discussing her observation on race, identity, and becomes a platform for her own self-discovery. She grows, therefore, more aware about race in America, and develops a new hybrid identity. As she goes through her many experiences in America, she realizes that she does not fully fit into the Nigerian or the American identity, which is a mix of her Nigerian roots and American experiences.

#### **a. Cross-Cultural Interactions:**

Cross-Cultural interactions play a major role in our world, which is characterized by many exchanges and interactions between different individuals and cultural backgrounds. As individual from different cultural backgrounds share diverse perspectives, values, beliefs and a richer understanding. These interactions provide opportunities for people to learn and appreciate different cultures, as well as to develop a greater understanding and tolerance for cultural diversity. (Medium, n.d). So, how these cultural interactions are displayed in the two novels?

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* is concerned, Cross-cultural interactions occur when characters from Ethiopian backgrounds interact with individuals who are part of the dominant American culture. These interactions can take place in various settings, such as workplaces, neighborhoods and social events. The main characters that dominate American culture and interact with Sepha are Judith and Naomi. Starting with, Naomi who has a huge impact on Sepha’s life. She came often to his store; they read books together and improved their sense of friendship and connection. He affirms: “It was that simple with her. She claimed

me without even trying, while I, for my part, gratefully accepted her designation as one half of a “we” with nothing but pride” (P.85). In this quote, Sepha reflects on how effortlessly Naomi’s presence in his life has affected him. It describes how Naomi naturally claimed him as someone important to her, without any conscious effort on her part. Sepha, in turn, embraces this friendship and the idea of being part of a ‘we’ with her, feeling proud to be recognized and included in her life. The quote also underlines the simplicity and genuineness of their bond illustrating the profound impact that relationships can have on our sense of self and identity. Sepha’s willingness to accept this friendship and take pride in it shows his emotional openness and emphasizes the power of human connections in shaping our lives. In addition to their connection that transcends cultural differences, suggests that genuine human connections can be formed regardless of background. It highlights the power of relationships to bridge gaps and create a sense of unity. Overall, this connection between Sepha and Naomi especially helps him to grow emotionally and find solace in his new life.

Furthermore, Sepha’s interaction with Mrs. Davis, who is his neighbor, expresses his will to interact with the community where he lives. As an immigrant from Ethiopia, he does not want to be seen as an outsider in his community as he affirms it clearly:

Beside Naomi, she was the only person I knew who called me Mr. Stephanos. There was something friendly and yet mocking in the way she said it, something akin to the way you can occasionally hear a mother refer to her son as a “big boy”. (P.177)

In this passage, when Sepha mentions that besides Naomi, Mrs. Davis was the only person who called him “Mr. Stephanos” with a tone that is both friendly and mocking, he provides insight into the dynamics of their cross-cultural relationship. So, Sepha refers to be called “Mr. Stephanos” which can be interpreted as a sign of respect or formality. However, the tone that Sepha describes that Mrs. Davis uses it in a somewhat teasing manner, which implies a level of comfort and camaraderie in their relationship. This observation by Sepha indicates a process of cross-cultural interaction because it highlights the multifaceted nature of relationships that can develop between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It also

illustrates how language and titles can be used to convey both respect and a sense of familiarity, which is a common aspect of cross-cultural interactions where people from diverse backgrounds come together in a shared community.

As far as in *Americanah*, cross-cultural interaction play a vital role in highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by the characters as they live in different cultural contexts. Their lives are shaped by the encounters and exchanges between individuals they come across from different backgrounds. Cross-cultural interactions appear through Ifemelu, who experiences a range of exchanges that profoundly shape her identity and highlight the complexities of cultural adaptation. Her experiences at both Aunty Uju's and Ginika's homes in America, showcase cross-cultural interactions in a domestic setting. They help her learning about American customs, habits and expectations. Also, through her interactions with Americans, Ifemelu confronts racial dynamics, cultural stereotypes, and the complexities of assimilation. Her relationship with Curt and Blaine provide a good example of cross-cultural interactions, both men, demonstrating the cultural gaps.

Additionally, Ifemelu's experiences with various hair salons, they highlight the ways in which hair can be a marker of identity and culture, and the challenges she faces in finding acceptance and understanding in hair styling practices in America. She says: "Ifemelu gave the woman a long look; it was not worth an argument. If they did not do curly, then they did not do curly, whatever curly was". (P.303). Most of the American salons do not do curly hair, eyebrows in other words they do not do curly whatever it was, so she has to travel or to move to other cities, to black salons in order to braid her hair. Moreover, Ifemelu's blog becomes a platform for numerous cross-cultural interactions; many readers become fans and support her daily blogs she says: "E-mails came from readers who wanted to support the blog. Support. That word made the blog even more apart from her, a separate thing that could thrive or not, sometimes without her and sometimes with her" (P.300). Readers from different parts of the

world admire her blog and support her. Also they engage in discussions, debates, and exchanges of ideas that shed light on the interactions of race, culture, hair and identity in different societies. Through Ifemelu's cross cultural interactions *Americanah* explores the complexities of identity formation, growth and transformation that can occur when individuals live in different cultures.

Similarly, Obinze's journey throughout *Americanah* is marked by various cross-cultural interactions that shape his understanding of identity, belonging and the complexities of the immigrant experiences. In London, Obinze's interactions with both Nigerians and non-Nigerians shed light on the challenges faced by immigrants to adapt to a new cultural environment.

### **b. The Quest for Identity and Self-Discovery:**

In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* where identity and self-discovery are central themes that spin through the narrative, shaping the protagonist Sepha Stephanos' journey. As Ifemelu, Sepha struggles with a complex sense of identity. His past in Ethiopia has loaded with memories of political turmoil and loss, while his presence in America is marked by the challenges of cultural assimilation and displacement. Sepha's story of self-discovery unfolds as he navigates the delicate balance between preserving his Ethiopian identity and embracing the opportunities presented in America.

Throughout the novel, Sepha embarks on a profound internal exploration, seeking meaning and purpose amidst the cultural environment surrounding him as he observes: "I think to myself, America is beautiful after all. There is more here. Gas is cheap. This is not a bad place. Things could be worse. And what else could I done?" (P.13). Through this reflection, we understand that the protagonist captures his experiences in America and the choices he has made. His acknowledgment that 'America is beautiful after all' reflects a shift in his way of thinking, indicates a moment of acceptance and adaptation to his new

surroundings. The realization that ‘there is more here’ suggests a growing awareness of the opportunities and possibilities that America offers, contrasting with his initial sense of displacement. It reflects his evolving understanding of identity and self-discovery.

Furthermore, Sepha’s willingness to engage in social exchanges, experiment with humor, and connect with others reflects his journey of self-discovery where he explores different facets of his identity while navigating the complexities of cultural integration. The following quote is an illustration:

Yes, As in, from now in you have to pay a fee at the door before you can come and read in my store,” Naomi shook her head and tried not to smile at my terrible joke, but I stared at her with my arms open until finally she relented and laughed even as she continued to shake her head. (P.119)

This passage reveals how Sepha’s attempt at humor reflects his evolving identity and sense of belonging in America. By making jokes and engaging with Naomi, he showcases his willingness to integrate into the social norms of his new environment. His playful comment represents his effort to adapt and find connections in a foreign land. It signifies a subtle shift in his identity, indicating a willingness to embrace the cultural nuances of his adopted home. Through interactions like these, he discovers that he can bridge the gap between his Ethiopian heritage and his American surroundings. These moments of camaraderie contribute to his evolving identity, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in shaping one's sense of self.

Furthermore, the novel portrays self-discovery as a continuous, evolving process. Sepha’s journey highlights the transformative power of human connections and the resilience of identity in the face of displacement as Sepha affirms:

We had been in America for only a couple of years when we first heard it, we did believe that we were children of revolution, and not only because we were willing to be grand. We all had stories of families we missed and would never see again. We spoke in our broken English of Africa’s tyrannies, which had yet to grow tedious. And we had our own stories of death and violence to match (P.50)

The reference to the ‘children of revolution’ suggests a deep sense of idealism and aspiration among the characters. They believe in the concept of revolution and identify themselves with it, symbolize their desire for change, progress, and a better life. This sentiment often links to themes of hope, ambition, and the pursuit of a brighter future. As other immigrants strive to define who he is in a new and unfamiliar environment. In addition to the aspiration to be part of a revolution reflects his desire for change and the continuous process of understanding his identity in the context of his immigrant experience. Ultimately, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* invites readers to think about complex aspects of identity and the profound journey toward self-discovery that defines the immigrant experience as an African immigrant.

Similar process takes place in *Americanah*, Adichie demonstrates, as mentioned previously, how Ifemelu struggles with her identity as an African and woman immigrant in America. Her experiences and interactions with others stand for her quest for herself discovery. As mentioned earlier too, she attempts to cope with the challenges of racism, alienation, cultural assimilation, and the pressure to conform to societal norms. As a result, these experiences and challenges are the main reasons that allow Ifemelu to discover her true self. This self-discovery leads her to take the decision of moving back to her homeland, Nigeria.

Through the novel, Ifemelu’s journey toward understanding her own identity is marked by her transition from Nigeria to America. In Nigeria, she identifies as Nigerian. However, upon arriving in the United States; she recognizes as ‘black’. This forces Ifemelu to struggle with race, belonging, and self-perception, which lead her to write her experiences and be a famous blogger. She creates a blog under the name of “The Non-American Black” that serves as a platform for her to explore and articulate her thoughts on race, identity and belonging. Through her writing, she does not only find her voice, but also engages with a

wider community of people who share similar experiences. Her blogs receives love and support from African immigrants and even other writers. Blaine's sister Shan points out:

"I have a Nigerian friend who is a writer. Do you know Kelechi Garuba?"

"I've read his work."

"We talked about your blog the other day and he said he was sure the Non-American Black was a Caribbean because Africans don't care about race. He'll be shocked when he meets you!" (P.314)

This dialogue illustrates Ifemelu's growing awareness of race and identity, particularly in the context of her experiences as a Non-American Black person. The comment made by Shan's friend, indicate a belief that Africans do not care about race. This interaction showcases Ifemelu's increasing consciousness about racial dynamics while her blog 'The Non-American Black' serves as a platform for her thoughts on these matters. Also, it demonstrates her willingness to engage with and confront prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions, which is a significant aspect of self-discovery and personal growth.

Moreover, her relationship in America with Curt plays a significant role in her journey of identity and self-discovery. Her interaction with this man highlights how different cultural perspectives can shape one's sense of self. Ifemelu's relationship with Curt, serves as a catalyst for her self-exploration. Curt is from a different cultural background, her link with him provides Ifemelu with a perspective that is unfamiliar to her. Through their relationship, Ifemelu gains new insights and understanding about herself and her place in the world. She says: "It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else" (P.193). This citation suggests that her relationship with Curt allows her to see herself in a new light; the expression 'seeing someone else' means that Ifemelu sees herself as a different version of who she was before. In the end, Adichie portrays Ifemelu's journey towards self-discovery as a dynamic process influenced by cultural shifts, personal relationships, and her own introspective writing. Through her experiences, the author highlights the complexity of identity, inviting readers to consider the ways in which personal and cultural context can shape one's sense of self.

### **c. The Way to Personal Growth:**

Personal growth refers to the process of self-transformation and self-discovery. It involves the development of new skills, new knowledge and adapting good habits and beliefs. All of them contribute to achieve individual and personal goals.

Personal growth comes to sign through Sepha's development in the course of Mengestu's narrative. The main character undergoes a transformation through his experiences and challenges in the story. We can cite pivotal moments in his life in the novel, such as his interactions with neighbors, which he combines with his reflections on his past in Ethiopia. Therefore, despite his challenges and obstacles Sepha meets in his way, he finally accepts his life and he became ready to start over with a new identity, new character that he has developed through his journey as the following excerpt testifies:

Right now, I'm convinced that my store looks more perfect than ever before. I can see it exactly as i have always wanted to see it. Through the canopy of trees that lind the walkway cutting through the middle of the circle is a store, One that is neither broken nor perfect, one that, regardless of everything, I'm happy to claim a entirely my own .(P.200)

The passage, Sepha expresses his sense of satisfaction with the way his store looks at that moment. He views it as neither perfect nor broken, but uniquely his own. This statement can be interpreted as a reflection of Sepha's personal growth and acceptance of his circumstances. He succeeds to find a sense of ownership and happiness in his store, despite its imperfections, which prove his evolving perspective and attitude towards life. It suggests that he appreciate the beauty by gaining a sense of fulfillment in claiming his own space.

Moreover, throughout the novel, Sepha's neighborhood undergoes significant changes, with gentrification and new residents moving in. His ability to adapt to these changes, both in his business and personal life, stands for his growth and resilience. Sepha's personal growth in the novel has marked by his evolving self-awareness and his ability to confront his past and make more deliberate choices about his future. He shifts from a state of passive existence to

one of reflection and self-examination, which ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of his own life and the world around him as the quote makes it obvious:

We stumble blindly from one place and life to the next. We try to do the best we can. There are moments like this, however, when we are neither coming nor going and all we have to do is sit and look back on life we have made. (P.201)

We understand then that Sepha's journey involving his efforts to build a better life for himself in America. He does his best to adapt to his circumstances as an immigrant. As the novel progresses, Sepha gradually overcomes his fears and challenges his emotional barriers. His interactions with Judith, Naomi, and others in the neighborhood lead him to take those difficult first and last steps. He starts to confront his past, build meaningful relationships, and adapt to new circumstances, signifying his personal growth and transformation. Thus, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* explores the profound themes of identity, cross-cultural interaction and personal growth as the characters evolve while navigating the complexities of his new life and relationships and the dynamics of their multicultural community in Washington, D.C.

In *Americanah*, personal growth is a significant theme that is explored by Ifemelu, who undergoes a process of self-discovery and transformation. She is known for her popular blog that has profound impact on her own personal growth and understanding of herself and the world around her. Throughout *Americanah* the creation and maintenance of her blog, titled "*Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly were known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" serves as a transformative outlet for her thoughts, experiences, and observations on race and identity in the novel. The blog allows Ifemelu to externalize her internal struggles and frustration. Through her writing, she learns to be able to share reflections and commentary on racial issues. This process of self-expression helps her gain clarity about her own experiences and feelings, provides her with a chance to

voice her frustrations. She openly discusses her experiences with racism in the following quote; she writes:

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. So, if you haven't lynched somebody then you can't be called a racist. (P.310)

This act of self-expression and sharing her thoughts and observation with others stands for her growth and illustrates her desire to find her voice and understand herself and accept her decision of returning to Nigeria after several years in America. This decision represents her growth in finding a sense of belonging in her home country. Personal growth in *Americanah* involves self-discovery, accepting societal norms and finding her voice journey.

Ifemelu, upon her return to Nigeria, she succeeds to reunite with her first love Obinze. Their meeting and their conversations serves as a powerful illustration of the changes and personal growth that can occur within an individual. By examining the following conversation, we can observe the evolution of Ifemelu's character and how her experiences have influenced her perspective on personal identity and cultural assimilation as the narrative voice maintains:

“What about you, famous race blogger, Princeton fellow, how have you changed?” he asked, smiling, leaning towards her with his elbows on the table.  
“When I was babysitting in undergrad, one day I heard myself telling the kid I was babysitting, ‘You’re such a trouper!’ Is there another word more American than ‘trouper?’”  
Obinze was laughing.  
“That’s when I thought, yes, I may have changed a little,” she said.  
“You don’t have an American accent.”  
“I made an effort not to.”  
“I was surprised when I read the archives of your blog. It didn’t sound like you.”  
“I really don’t think I’ve changed that much, though.”  
“Oh, you’ve changed,” he said with a certitude that she instinctively disliked.  
“How?”  
“I don’t know. You’re more self-aware. Maybe more guarded”. (P.420)

This dialogue between Ifemelu and Obinze serves as a significant illustration of personal Ifemelu's maturity. Throughout their conversation, Ifemelu reflects on her past experiences and acknowledges the changes she has undergone since moving to the United States. In her

response, Ifemelu, mentions an incident from her undergraduate years when she used the word ‘trouper’ with an incident with a child she was babysitting. This indicates that she becomes aware of American culture and language. According to Homi K.Bhabha this can be a kind of “Mimicry” or imitating the other’s language. Also her decision to consciously avoid adopting an American accent when she says “I made an effort not to” demonstrate her effort to maintain her Nigerian identity. However, Obinze with a sense of certainty, asserts that Ifemelu has indeed changed and highlights her increased self-awareness and guardedness. This suggests that Ifemelu’s time spent abroad contributed to change her way of thinking, resulting in personal growth and transformation for the better.

Likewise, Obinze undergoes his own personal growth. On his deportation to Nigeria, Obinze aspires to be wealthy and successful. In the first chapter, Adichie demonstrate how Obinze becomes rich as the passage makes it clear:

When Obinze first saw her e-mail, he was sitting in the back of his Range Rover in still Lagos traffic, his jacket slung over the front seat, a rustyhaired child beggar glued outside his window, a hawker pressing colorful CDs against the other window, the radio turned on low to the Pidgin English news on Wazobia FM, and the gray gloom of imminent rain all around. He stared at his BlackBerry, his body suddenly rigid. (P.26)

However, during his time passed in London, he realizes that material wealth and social status do not bring him true happiness or fulfillment. So, after being deported from London, prompts him to reflect on his identity and his Nigerian roots. These experiences highlight Obinze’s personal growth in *Americanah* as he experiences new environments, confront societal challenges and undergoes a transformation in his values and priorities.

Furthermore, the growth of Ifemelu and Obinze’s relationship throughout the novel is a good example of personal growth. As they face various challenges and obstacles over the years, including being separated by distance and other relationships, they evolve as individuals. Their personal growth has reflected in their changed perspectives and matured approach to their relationship, highlighting their individual growth journeys.

By comparing the two novels, we found out that they share common themes of identity formation, cross-cultural interaction, and personal growth of the main characters. However, they differ in terms of their structures as well as their settings. The important parallels between the novels, is to be found in the complex process of identity formation, particularly for immigrants or individuals living in culturally diverse environments. In “*Americanah*” the protagonist, Ifemelu, strives with her Nigerian identity and experiences a transformation in her understanding of race and identity while living in the United States. Then, in “*The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*” Sepha, the central character, also faces questions about his Ethiopian identity and place in American society as an immigrant. Secondly, the two novels depict the interactions and relationships between characters from different cultural backgrounds. Ifemelu’s experiences in the U.S. and Sepha’s interactions with various residents in his multicultural neighborhood highlight the challenges and rewards of connecting with people from different backgrounds. These interactions often lead to a deeper understanding of cultural differences and affinities. Thirdly, throughout the novels, characters undergo significant personal growth. Ifemelu and Sepha evolve emotionally, intellectually, and culturally as they cope with the challenges and opportunities in their respective environments and evolve as individuals with double cultures.

Also, both texts have explored the themes of identity and self-discovery among immigrants. Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Sepha in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* undergo profound journeys, navigating the complexities of their cultural identities in foreign lands. Their experiences highlight the challenges of adaptation, blending their roots with new environments. These stories mirror the real struggles immigrants face, emphasizes the universal quest for belonging and understanding one’s identity in the face of cultural diversity. Both novels capture the essence of immigrant experiences, showcases the shared themes of self-discovery, identity formation, and the pursuit of a place to call home.

In contrast to these similarities, there are also significant differences between the two novels such as the setting; *"Americanah"* primarily takes place in the United States and Nigeria, while *"The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears"* is set exclusively in Washington, D.C. The different settings influence the cultural dynamics and experiences of the characters. In addition to the characters' immigration experience, in *"Americanah"* the immigrant experience is portrayed through the lens of Ifemelu's journey to the U.S. as a student and her subsequent challenges as an African immigrant, particularly her exploration of race and the concept of "American Dream". Whereas, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* explores the immigrant experience through Sepha's perspective as he runs a small convenience store in a diverse neighborhood and the novel delves into themes of isolation, displacement, and the longing for a sense of home.

## V- Conclusion

In our research, we delved deep into the common complexities as portrayed in Dinaw Mengestu's "*The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*" and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "*Americanah*" such as homeland nostalgia and reunion, isolation, alienation and cultural clash, using Homi Bhabha's concepts of 'Mimicry' and 'Hybridity' as analytical tools. In chapter one, we explored how these complexities manifest the lives of the protagonists in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah*. Both novels depict characters struggling with feelings of displacement and cultural conflict as they navigate their new environments. These experiences shape their sense of identity and belonging, highlighting the challenges immigrants face in adapting to foreign lands. In the second chapter, our focus shifted to the characters' journeys of self-formation within the context of their immigrant experiences. We examined how the protagonists in both novels undergo personal growth, self-discovery, and cross-cultural interactions influenced by their status as immigrants. Through our analysis, we found that Mimicry and Hybridity were key concepts in understanding how the characters adapt and evolve in response to their experiences.

In conclusion, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *Americanah* emphasize the common struggles faced by immigrants, from feelings of nostalgia and isolation to the complexities of identity formation in a new cultural context. The theme of immigration serves as a rich narrative thread, weaving together the protagonists' struggles and transformations as they seek a sense of belonging and self-realization in their adopted countries.

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