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Dedication

To my loving parents, for their tireless support, endless encouragement, and unconditional love.

My siblings, Kamilia, Amar, Imene, for always being by my side and inspiring me to seek excellence.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the theme of the *African as Stranger* in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). It begins by examining how the sense of strangeness is reflected in the lives of the protagonists, particularly through their struggles with identity, belonging, and feelings of estrangement. To frame the analysis, the study relies on Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), which introduces the key ideas of the stranger, the stranger within, and the uncanny. These concepts provide the tools to explore how both authors represent the experience of the stranger and the unsettling emotions that accompany it. The dissertation then shows how the protagonists feel out of place both abroad and at home, and how uncanny emotions resurface when they return to their homelands. This highlights the lasting presence of the "stranger within," suggesting that estrangement is not only linked to migration but also part of the human condition. Finally, this research argues that the African as stranger, as portrayed in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah*, is a figure caught between two worlds, always moving along the edges of identity, belonging, and alienation.

Keywords: African Stranger, stranger, uncanny, identity, belonging, alienation

Content

I. Introduction

The concept of the stranger has always been something that philosophers, sociologists, and literary theorists have been interested in. A stranger isn't just someone who comes from another place or culture; they're more complicated than that. They're someone who exists in this tension between being part of a community and being apart from it, between feeling close and feeling distant. This position makes people think about social norms in new ways, and it shows how complicated identity and social interaction really are (Simmel, 1908). The stranger is like a mirror to society, helping us see things like alienation, cultural differences, and human subjectivity in a different light. Understanding the stranger means looking not just at social aspects but also at the psychological side, and seeing how both affect the person and the people around them (Kristeva, 1991).

Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) is especially useful for understanding this. She says that a stranger is different from the majority group, both socially and psychologically. They're part of society, but also somehow outside it at the same time. This dual position means the stranger can show us tensions in identity formation and in social rules (Kristeva, 1991). Alienation, she explains, isn't just something society imposes; it also shapes how the stranger sees themselves and the world. The stranger is always negotiating between the pressures around them and their own internal experiences, which makes their position kind of contradiction they are inside and outside all at once.

Other scholars also talk about how the stranger's position is always relational. Simmel (1908) said that a stranger is part of a group but distant in some way, and because of that distance, they can see things the group members can't. Lähdesmäki (2017) adds that a stranger's identity isn't fixed; it's something that changes depending on the situation and how others see them. This shows that alienation isn't just in society, it's also felt inside the

person. So the stranger is always balancing between wanting to belong and feeling excluded (Simmel, 1908; Kristeva, 1991).

The idea of the stranger also comes up a lot when we talk about migration and moving between cultures. These days, many societies are more mobile, and people experience being a stranger more often (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Migrants face different social and cultural expectations, which means they often have to manage dual identities or mix different cultural practices (Vertovec, 2009). Kristeva (1991) points out that this balancing act is ongoing. The stranger's sense of belonging isn't permanent; it changes with the situation. Their alienation isn't just about moving from one place to another; it's also psychological and cultural.

Even returning home doesn't always fix things. Bhabha (1994) notes that coming back to one's original community doesn't automatically make the person feel at home. They might find some familiarity, but they can still feel distant psychologically or socially, because experiences abroad change how they see themselves and the world. Kristeva (1991) says the same: belonging is influenced by both outside factors and internal feelings. So even in a familiar place, the stranger may still feel alienated (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Simmel, 1908).

Studying the stranger helps us understand identity and social life more broadly. Being a stranger involves negotiating who you are and how you relate to the group around you. Alienation, dual identity, and estrangement are all part of this, and they show how complicated belonging can be (Kristeva, 1991; Lähdesmäki, 2017). Strangers aren't just outsiders; they actually help us see how society decides who belongs and who doesn't (Simmel, 1908; Bhabha, 1994).

The aim of this research is to look at the stranger through Kristeva's theory, focusing on the social, psychological, and cultural aspects. I want to explore alienation, dual identity, and the paradox of belonging. By doing this, I hope to show why studying strangers is important for understanding human experience, identity, and social life. The theoretical discussion here will also give a solid background for later analyzing how foreignness and alienation appear in literature (Kristeva, 1991; Bhabha, 1994).

At last , the stranger is a key figure for understanding identity and society. Kristeva's ideas, along with insights from sociology, postcolonial theory, and psychology, show that being a stranger isn't just about being in a different place; it's also about being in a different psychological and social space. Studying the stranger lets us see how people navigate belonging and exclusion, and it highlights how personal and social identity are connected (Kristeva, 1991; Simmel, 1908; Bhabha, 1994; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). In the context of literature, this focus on the stranger is especially important, because fictional narratives often show how characters experience alienation, negotiate dual identities, and struggle with the paradox of homecoming. By centering the stranger, this research provides a theoretical lens to analyze how the two novels such as Tayeb Salih's *Season Of Migration To the North (1966)a* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's*s Americanah (2013)* reflect the social and psychological dynamics of strangeness, making the themes of estrangement and belonging more visible and meaningful.

a. Review of literature

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) is widely regarded as a classic of modern Arabic literature, celebrated for its complex exploration of colonial legacies, identity, and cultural conflict. Scholars have approached the novel from multiple perspectives. From a feminist standpoint, Osman and Khessibi (2018) argue that the novel

reflects the persistence of patriarchy in Sudanese society during the colonial period, with female characters caught in restrictive cultural frameworks. Although their focus is gender, their work indirectly highlights broader themes of marginalization and estrangement that resonate with the novel's male characters as well. Other critics adopt a postcolonial lens. Hassan, Najadat, Azmi, Abubakar, and Lawan (2016) examine how Salih dramatizes the clash of cultures and the unstable identities produced by colonial encounters. Similarly, Lamraoui (2019) analyzes the protagonist's difficulty in reconciling his hybrid identity, showing how Salih's text portrays the immigrant as perpetually in-between. Both readings shed light on the protagonist's alienation and suggest how Salih anticipates the figure of the "stranger" caught between worlds.

The novel has also been studied through psychoanalysis. Tarawneh and John (2020) argue that Freudian concepts such as repression and the Oedipus complex shape both characterization and theme. Their analysis underscores the psychological dimensions of estrangement, where the self becomes foreign even to itself.

Like Salih's work, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) has generated wide critical discussion, particularly for its depiction of migration and identity in a globalized world. From a feminist perspective, Sebola (2017) explores how Adichie critiques both African and American patriarchal systems, portraying the struggles of Nigerian women abroad. Similarly, Larasati and Kasih (2021) examine how women's labor becomes a site of exploitation in *Americanah*. While these studies emphasize gender, they also point to the condition of being doubly estranged both as women and as migrants. Other critics emphasize postcolonial identity. Ferguson Martin (2018) argues for a postcolonial feminist reading that challenges simplified Western feminist models by foregrounding diverse experiences of Nigerian women. Her work stresses the intersection of race, gender,

and colonial history, issues closely linked to the sense of displacement and unbelonging central to the figure of the stranger.

Finally, Pourgharib (2020) applies trauma theory to analyze how memory and storytelling allow characters like Ifemelu and Obinze to confront alienation and reconstruct their sense of self. His analysis suggests that migration itself produces a form of psychological estrangement akin to Kristeva's (1991) concept of the stranger within. Taken together, these studies confirm that both *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah* have been widely examined through feminism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and trauma studies. However, few critics have addressed them comparatively, and none have applied Julia Kristeva's theory of the stranger from *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991). This gap underscores the need for a study that foregrounds the theme of the stranger its manifestations in identity, alienation, and homecoming across both novels.

In addition to these earlier studies, more recent scholarship continues to illuminate the enduring relevance of both novels to postcolonial and transnational discussions of identity. Critics such as Hassan (2021) interpret Salih's protagonist as "a tragic hybrid whose colonial education produces not enlightenment but existential displacement" (p. 44). This reading resonates with Frantz Fanon's (2008) insight that colonial schooling transforms the colonized into an alienated mimic of the colonizer. Similarly, Pourgharib and Norouzi (2015) apply Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity to show that Mustafa Sa'eed's identity "oscillates between colonizer and colonized, never achieving stability."

Further, Jamshed (2020) argues that Mustafa's erotic relationships with European women enact a symbolic reversal of colonial domination, yet this subversion ultimately traps him in the same cycle of violence and alienation he seeks to escape. Ahmed (2022) expands on this psychological reading, proposing that the "secret room" in Mustafa's house

functions as a metaphor for the unconscious, where the repressed colonial experience returns as haunting. Likewise, Al-Zou'bi (2023) situates *Season of Migration to the North* within post-independence discourse, arguing that the text exposes the impossibility of returning home unchanged by empire. Together, these studies emphasize that Salih's novel dramatizes the stranger not merely as a cultural outsider but as a divided self haunted by memory and history.

Turning to Adichie, *Americanah* continues to generate vibrant critical engagement for its nuanced portrayal of migration, race, and gender in the twenty-first century. Okuyade (2020) observes that Adichie "renders blackness as a lesson learned through displacement," demonstrating how Ifemelu's identity is reconfigured by her encounter with American racial hierarchies. Ejiofor (2021) adds that the protagonist's blog serves as a therapeutic and political space that transforms alienation into agency — a site where the migrant reclaims voice through narrative.

Scholars such as Gupta (2018) locate *Americanah* within the global economic order, arguing that Adichie redefines the African Bildungsroman to reflect transnational mobility. Eze (2022) interprets Ifemelu's decision to wear her natural hair as "an act of resistance to colonial aesthetics and a reclamation of cultural authenticity" (p. 85). Meanwhile, Nwosu (2023) underscores the gendered dimension of migration, contending that Ifemelu's estrangement is compounded by patriarchal expectations in both Nigeria and the United States. Building on this, Onuah (2024) draws from Afropolitanism to portray Ifemelu as an empowered hybrid subject whose fluid identity defies fixed categories of belonging. These newer readings extend feminist and postcolonial discussions, showing that Adichie transforms alienation into self-realization through storytelling and self-reflection.

Comparative scholarship on *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah* remains relatively limited but is growing in importance. Makdisi (2019) bridges the two novels, noting that both "renarrate the empire from its margins" and use return migration as a way of confronting historical and cultural dislocation. Through the figures of Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu, Salih and Adichie interrogate the boundaries between self and other, home and abroad themes that resonate strongly with Julia Kristeva's (1991) reflections in *Strangers to Ourselves.*

In Kristeva's view, the stranger is not merely the outsider encountered in society but a presence within the self the "stranger within." Reading both novels through this lens allows us to see how alienation and homecoming operate not just as external experiences of migration, but as inner psychological states. Mustafa Sa'eed's fragmentation and Ifemelu's cultural disorientation each illustrate the internal foreignness that Kristeva identifies as central to human identity.

The current study therefore positions itself within this emerging comparative field but distinguishes itself by relying exclusively on Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory of the stranger. Unlike other scholars who employ postcolonial or feminist frameworks, this dissertation uses *Strangers to Ourselves* as its principal theoretical source to reveal how both authors portray the foreigner not simply as a social outsider but as a mirror of inner division. This approach bridges the psychological and cultural dimensions of estrangement and highlights how both Salih and Adichie transform the experience of otherness into a profound meditation on identity and belonging.

b. Issue and Working Hypothesis

The question of how **"the African as stranger"** is represented lies at the heart of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966/2009) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), as both novels depict protagonists grappling with alienation, displacement, and the search for belonging across cultural boundaries. Although these works have received considerable critical attention, they have not been systematically examined through the theoretical framework proposed by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991). Kristeva (1991) argues that the stranger is not only the outsider encountered in society but also the unsettling presence within the self, a concept that illuminates the internal and external forms of alienation experienced by Salih's and Adichie's characters. This dissertation hypothesizes that, although written in distinct historical and cultural contexts, both novels portray the African as stranger as a figure suspended between belonging and exclusion, suggesting that estrangement arises not only from colonial or postcolonial displacement but also from an inherent human condition of otherness (Adichie, 2013; Kristeva, 1991; Salih, 1966/2009).

c. Methodological Outline

We structure this dissertation according to the IMRAD model. In the introduction, we present the research problem and objectives, followed by a review of selected scholarship on Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. In the methodology, we adopt Julia Kristeva's theory of the stranger, developed in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), as the theoretical framework. The analysis is organized into two chapters. Chapter One, *Character Analysis of the Stranger in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, examines how the two authors depict the immigrant experience and the

individual's position in the host society. Chapter Two, *Homecoming: The Return of the Protagonists to their Homeland in Salih's Season of Migration to the North and Adichie's Americanah,* explores the sense of uncanniness and estrangement that emerges upon return, providing psychological depth to our study. Finally, we conclude with a synthesis of the main findings and a reflection on their broader implications..

II. Methods and Materials

1. Julia Kristeva's Strangers to Ourselves (1991):

Julia Kristeva (b. 1941) is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, psychoanalyst, and literary theorist whose work has greatly influenced contemporary thought. After leaving Bulgaria for France in the 1960s, she became a leading voice in structuralist and psychoanalytic circles, working closely with figures such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. Throughout her career, Kristeva has explored questions of language, identity, and subjectivity, often examining the hidden tensions within the self. Her work brings together philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis, and ethics, always seeking to understand how human beings relate to what is stranger , both in others and in themselves.

Her book *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) represents one of her most profound contributions to modern humanist thought. Written at a time when Europe was facing renewed debates about immigration, nationalism, and belonging, Kristeva reflects on the meaning of the *stranger*. She asks what it truly means to be a stranger and challenges the assumption that strangeness is something that exists only outside of us. For Kristeva (1991), the stranger is not simply the outsider, the immigrant, or the other. The stranger is part of us; it is the side of our being that feels unfamiliar, repressed, or hidden. She writes, "The foreigner lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity" (p. 191). With this statement, Kristeva transforms the idea of the stranger into a universal human condition. We are all, in some way, strangers to our own desires, our own histories, and even our own sense of belonging.

This idea marks a radical departure from traditional ways of defining identity. Instead of seeing the self and the stranger as opposites, Kristeva (1991) shows that the two are inseparable. The stranger is not the enemy of the self but its reflection. Our identity, she explains, is never complete or fixed; it is always changing, divided, and open to the

unknown. By recognizing the stranger within, we begin to understand that difference is not a threat but an essential part of who we are. This awareness also changes how we see others. When we accept that we are strangers to ourselves, we can meet the foreigner outside us the refugee, the exile, the outsider with empathy rather than fear.

Kristeva's vision of the stranger is not only psychological but also ethical. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, she argues that the rejection of the foreigner whether through prejudice, exclusion, or hatred is in fact a rejection of our own divided nature. When societies deny or fear the stranger, they are projecting their inner anxieties outward. The hostility toward the other, she suggests, is a symptom of our inability to accept the stranger within. To overcome this, Kristeva proposes a new kind of humanism one based on self-knowledge, acceptance, and compassion. True humanity begins, she insists, when we learn to coexist with our own inner strangeness.

Kristeva's reflections also draw on the psychoanalytic concept of *the uncanny* (*das Unheimlich*), first introduced by Sigmund Freud (1919/1955). For Freud, the uncanny describes the disturbing feeling that arises when something once familiar becomes strangely unfamiliar — when what was hidden returns. Kristeva (1991) develops this idea further, suggesting that the uncanny is what we experience when we come face to face with our inner stranger. It is the moment when the familiar self suddenly feels foreign, when the boundaries between "me" and "not me" blur. This unsettling encounter, though often painful, is necessary for growth and understanding. To meet the stranger within is to face the truth of who we are complex, divided, and never entirely at home.

Through this exploration, Kristeva reshapes our understanding of what it means to be human. She rejects the traditional image of a unified, stable self and replaces it with a more honest vision — one in which the self is always in motion, shaped by encounters with

difference. “We are strangers to ourselves,” Kristeva (1991, p. 1) declares, and in this statement lies the heart of her philosophy. To live ethically, she argues, we must accept this internal division rather than deny it. The stranger teaches us humility; it reminds us that no person or culture possesses complete truth. In recognizing the stranger, we open ourselves to dialogue, tolerance, and understanding.

Strangers to Ourselves(1991) is therefore both a psychoanalytic and a philosophical work but also a deeply ethical one. Kristeva invites readers to see strangeness not as a barrier but as a bridge. The presence of the stranger, whether inside or outside, pushes us to question who we are and what it means to belong. This questioning, though unsettling, is vital for personal and collective transformation. By accepting our inner foreignness, we can begin to build communities founded on empathy rather than exclusion.

Kristeva’s theory of the stranger provides the conceptual foundation for this dissertation. Her reflections on the divided self, the uncanny, and the ethics of coexistence offer a framework for understanding alienation and belonging as fundamental aspects of human experience. The stranger, in Kristeva’s view, is not merely a social outsider but a mirror of the human soul a reminder that to know ourselves, we must first face what feels foreign within. This theoretical perspective will guide the subsequent analysis, illuminating how the idea of the stranger shapes identity, memory, and the longing for home.

2. Materials

a. Summary of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to The North*

Season of Migration to the North (1966) by Tayeb Salih is set in Sudan and England. The story begins with an unnamed narrator returning to his village in Sudan after studying in England. There, he meets Mustafa Sa'eed, a mysterious man who has recently settled in the village. Over time, Mustafa reveals his past: he had studied in London, where he became a successful student but also engaged in several destructive relationships with European women. These relationships ended tragically, with some of the women taking their own lives, including Jean Morris, with whom he had a particularly intense and troubled connection.

Mustafa is later put on trial in England for Jean's death and spends time in prison before returning to Sudan to live quietly. After his disappearance, the narrator becomes intrigued by Mustafa's life and discovers a hidden room in his house filled with books and personal belongings that reflect his time in Europe. The novel ends with the narrator in a moment of crisis at the Nile, caught between life and death.

b. Summary of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah

Americanah (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie follows the life of Ifemelu, a young woman from Lagos, Nigeria. She leaves her home country to pursue her education in the United States, where she is confronted with new challenges, including financial struggles and cultural adjustment. In America, she becomes more aware of issues of race,

something she had not experienced in the same way in Nigeria. During her time abroad, Ifemelu starts a blog called *The Non-American Black*, where she writes about her experiences and observations of race and identity in the United States. Meanwhile, her former boyfriend, Obinze, faces his own struggles as an undocumented immigrant in the United Kingdom before eventually returning to Nigeria.

After several years in America, Ifemelu decides to return to Nigeria. Back in Lagos, she finds it difficult to readjust, noticing changes both in herself and in her country. The novel closes with her attempt to rebuild her life and reconnect with Obinze.

III. Results

This section presents the findings of this research, examining how the protagonists of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) embody the condition of the stranger. Using Julia Kristeva's theory of the foreigner as outlined in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), this study highlights the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of foreignness, showing how the protagonists' experiences reflect persistent alienation, dual identity, and the paradoxical nature of homecoming.

The analysis reveals that Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu both occupy spaces of liminality, where belonging is constantly negotiated and never fully achieved. In both cases, the protagonists' experiences illustrate Kristeva's assertion that the stranger is not merely someone physically or geographically outside a community, but someone whose presence destabilizes existing social and cultural boundaries. The stranger embodies both proximity and distance, creating a tension that shapes both personal identity and social interaction (Kristeva, 1991).

One of the most striking findings of this study is the persistence of alienation in the lives of both protagonists. Mustafa Sa'eed, educated in Europe and deeply immersed in Western culture, experiences a constant tension between his Sudanese origins and his European surroundings. His foreignness is not solely defined by his nationality but also by his psychological and social detachment. Kristeva's theory emphasizes that the stranger exists simultaneously as part of and apart from the host society. Mustafa's inability to fully integrate into either culture illustrates this duality: he is at once a member of European society by education and experience, yet remains a stranger because he cannot reconcile the

internalized norms of one culture with those of another. His alienation is thus both self-imposed and socially reinforced, reflecting the complex dynamics of foreignness that Kristeva describes (Kristeva, 1991).

Ifemelu's experience in the United States mirrors this persistent estrangement, though in a contemporary and racialized context. Her life as an immigrant exposes her to systemic prejudices, microaggressions, and cultural misunderstandings, reinforcing her status as a stranger in a foreign society. Her foreignness is further complicated by her reflections on race, identity, and belonging, which become central to her understanding of herself and her place in the world. Even upon returning to Nigeria, Ifemelu cannot fully shed her sense of being an outsider. Kristeva's insights illuminate this persistent alienation, showing that the stranger's experience is not limited to the foreign land; it is also shaped by the internalization of experiences and encounters with otherness, creating a permanent state of liminality (Kristeva, 1991).

Another prominent finding is the development of dual identities among the protagonists. Mustafa Sa'eed's European education and intimate relationships with European women allow him to navigate multiple cultural spheres. Yet, despite this apparent adaptability, he remains fundamentally estranged, unable to fully claim belonging in either his homeland or abroad. Kristeva's framework suggests that the stranger occupies a position of negotiation, perpetually balancing the tension between belonging and exclusion. Mustafa's dual identity exemplifies this tension, showing how the foreigner must constantly mediate between competing cultural expectations and social norms (Kristeva, 1991).

Ifemelu also embodies cultural hybridity, though expressed through her transnational experience and self-reflection. Her time in America shapes her perspectives on race, social hierarchy, and identity, transforming her understanding of her own culture and

that of others. Writing her blog becomes a strategy for negotiating her foreignness, allowing her to articulate the complexities of being a stranger and to assert a sense of agency over her identity. The duality of her identity underscores Kristeva's argument that the stranger's self is constructed in dialogue with the other, and that the negotiation of identity is continuous and context-dependent (Kristeva, 1991).

The results further reveal the paradoxical nature of homecoming for both protagonists. Mustafa's return to Sudan is fraught with tension. Despite physically being "home," he is perceived as a foreigner by those around him, illustrating that the return of the stranger does not guarantee belonging. His experiences reflect Kristeva's observation that the stranger is defined not only by proximity to a community but also by perception and recognition. Similarly, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria brings both comfort and dissonance. The years spent abroad have transformed her worldview, altering how she engages with her homeland and creating a sense of estrangement even within familiar surroundings. This paradox highlights the enduring nature of the stranger's condition, showing that homecoming does not resolve alienation but instead complicates the relationship between self and society (Kristeva, 1991).

A final key finding concerns the relational aspect of being a stranger. Both Mustafa and Ifemelu's experiences of estrangement are mediated by the reactions of those around them. In both cases, foreignness is socially constructed, shaped by societal perceptions, cultural norms, and interpersonal interactions. Kristeva emphasizes that the stranger's identity is defined as much by others as by the individual, and that the experience of being a stranger is inseparable from the responses it provokes. This relational dimension reveals that the alienation of the stranger is not only internal but also externally reinforced, underscoring the social dynamics that perpetuate foreignness and limit the possibilities of integration or acceptance (Kristeva, 1991).

In conclusion, the results of this study demonstrate that the protagonists of *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah* exemplify the multifaceted condition of the stranger. Through persistent alienation, dual identity, paradoxical homecoming, and socially mediated estrangement, Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu reveal the complexities of foreignness in ways that resonate strongly with Julia Kristeva's theoretical framework. These findings underscore the enduring relevance of the concept of the stranger and its central role in understanding human identity, belonging, and cultural negotiation.

IV.Discussion

In this section of our work intends to examine the issue of the African stranger in Tayeb Salih ‘s Season of Migration to the North and Adichie’s Americanah employing Julia Kristeva ‘s theory *Stranger to Ourselves* (1991). Both novels feature protagonists who explore complex identities shaped by transnational experiences, alienation, and the sense of being an outsider. The first chapter will discuss a character analysis where we will examine the foreigner status of Mustafa Sa'eed in *Season of Migration to the North* and Ifemelu in *Americanah.* These characters face cultural disconnection and feel out of place as they experience foreign societies that attract them but also make them feel isolated. The second chapter will focus on the protagonists' return to their homelands. The idea of homecoming in both novels will highlight the contradictions of returning to a place that once felt familiar. Using Julia Kristeva’s concept of the uncanny, this chapter will explore how Mustafa and Ifemelu struggle with unresolved identities, raising the question of whether they can ever truly feel at home. By examining their experiences abroad and their attempts to reintegrate, this section of the dissertation will shed light on the ongoing challenges of identity, displacement, and the search for belonging in an interconnected world.

Chapter one: Character Analysis of The Stranger in Tayeb Salih ‘s *Season of Migration to the North* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*

In this chapter we will focus on analysing the foreign characters in Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah.* Both novels present protagonists, Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu, who find themselves in foreign countries and experience the feeling of being outsiders. In addition to that, This chapter will explore how each

character deals with being a foreigner, the challenges they face in adapting to new cultures, and how these experiences shape their identities. By comparing their journeys, this chapter will highlight the themes of alienation, cultural conflict, and the search for belonging in unfamiliar environments**.**

1.1 The character Analysis of the Stranger (Mustafa sa'eed) in Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

1.1.1 The Fluidity of Identity and the Crisis of Belonging

The search for identity in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* is a profoundly intricate and shifting process. In the novel, identity is not a stable or singular essence but a fluid, ever-changing construction shaped by experience, displacement, and cultural encounter. It becomes most fragile when it faces crises of belonging moments when the self is unsettled by contradiction, difference, or doubt.

Anthropologist Bradd Shore (1996) defines identity as "an ongoing construction, continuously redefined through experience and interaction," (p.46), a notion that resonates deeply with Julia Kristeva's understanding of the self as fractured and relational. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Kristeva proposes that identity is never entirely self-contained; it exists through and against the presence of the "other." She asserts, "Strangely, our identity is defined by that which eludes it—in other words, by the other whom we bear within us and who holds us to our commitments to others and to ourselves." (Kristeva, 1991, p. 182) .This insight captures the paradox of the foreigner: strangeness is not merely something external but something internal an inseparable part of one's own being.

1.1.2 Mustafa Sa'eed: The Embodiment of Inner Estrangement

Mustafa Sa'eed, the enigmatic protagonist of Salih's novel, personifies this condition of inner exile. He is a stranger both to the European world he enters and to the Sudanese homeland he returns to. His life unfolds as a journey across cultures, languages, and psychological landscapes an odyssey that mirrors the divided identity of the postcolonial subject. From early childhood, Mustafa is portrayed as intellectually gifted yet emotionally detached. His exceptional intelligence sets him apart from his peers: "His intelligence was obvious from the first day he arrived at the school… His bright eyes, and his ability to answer questions with ease, set him apart from the others." (Salih,1966, p. 29) .This brilliance, while celebrated, becomes the first marker of his estrangement. According to Kristeva, the more a subject distinguishes themselves through intellect, language, or difference, the deeper their sense of foreignness becomes even within familiar surroundings.

1.1.3 The Journey to Europe: From Promise to Alienation

When Mustafa receives a scholarship to study abroad, his journey to Europe becomes a symbolic passage into otherness. He recalls, "Europe was like a dream of glass and steel, a world where the colour of my skin and the accent of my voice were more significant than the brilliance of my mind" (Salih, 1966, p. 113). Through this experience, Salih exposes the irony of colonial education it empowers the colonized subject intellectually while reducing him to an object of racial fascination. Mustafa's accomplishments are obscured by the Western gaze that exoticizes and objectifies him. Kristeva's (1991) observation that "the foreigner lives within us, yet he is the visible face of our difference" (p. 1) perfectly illuminates Mustafa's dilemma.

Even before reaching London, Mustafa experiences early signs of displacement in Cairo. Though geographically and culturally closer to Sudan, Cairo represents an initial stage of estrangement. He reflects, "My knowledge had increased and several minor

incidents had happened to me… Nothing whatsoever had happened except that the waterskin had distended further, the bowstring had become tauter. The arrow will shoot forth towards other unknown horizons" (Salih, 1966, p. 47). This image really shows the tension within him , a readiness to move forward coupled with a profound emotional emptiness. Kristeva (1991) describes this internal condition as "the silent revolt of the foreigner," the state of being unable to belong because the self is unanchored from any true home (p. 12).

1.1.4 The Fragmented Self: Between Dual Selves and Unsettled Journeys

Mustafa's feeling of alienation becomes even stronger when he moves to England. It's there that his personality seems to split into two. He admits that when he was a student in Cairo, he was one person, but in London, he became someone completely different. He even wonders which of his two lives was the lie the one in Cairo or the one in London (Salih, 1966, p. 60). This shows how lost he feels between two sides of himself, never knowing which one is truly his. He lives between his admiration for Europe and his anger toward it.

He later says, "I was two things at once, yet neither one" (Salih, 1966, p. 38), and that line really sums up his struggle. It reflects what Kristeva (1991) calls the "stranger within," the idea that a person can be divided inside their own identity. Mustafa becomes like that a man split from the inside, always trying to belong but never really fitting anywhere. He reminds us of Fanon's (1952) view of the colonized intellectual in *Black Skin, White Masks* , someone who imitates the colonizer but also rejects him, and in the process, loses his sense of wholeness. At one point, Mustafa says he was "something which had passed across the Mediterranean Sea and gone into the heart of Europe, had passed across it like the sea passes through a river" (Salih, 1966, p. 75). This image shows how restless and unsettled he

is. He moves between places and cultures but never truly belongs to any of them. Like water flowing through another current, he keeps moving without ever finding a shore.

This endless movement shows the deep disconnection left by colonialism. Mustafa is torn between two worlds the Africa that shaped him and the Europe that defined and rejected him at the same time. He is close to both and distant from both. In the end, he becomes the perfect example of what Kristeva (1991) describes as the foreigner someone caught between closeness and distance, similarity and difference. Mustafa Sa'eed stands as a symbol of the postcolonial stranger, a man divided by history and culture, always traveling between worlds but never finding home.

1.1.5 Mustafa's Emotional Distance and Inner Exile

Even though Mustafa is physically present in European society, he remains emotionally and culturally distant, showing what Julia Kristeva (1991) calls *internal exile*. His journey through Europe reflects the condition of a *stranger* who lives between two worlds , his own culture and the new one , never fully accepted by either. Mustafa's romantic relationships with European women further expose this alienation. As he admits, "I have come to realize that everything in my life has been leading up to this moment" (Salih, 1966, p. 95). This statement shows Mustafa's painful awareness of being perceived as the exotic "other." He feels trapped between who he truly is and who society wants him to be. This awareness increases his sense of alienation, creating a heavy burden within him. Mustafa realizes he is admired only for his difference, not for his individuality, which leaves him feeling unseen and disconnected.

1.1.6 Mustafa's Relationships with European Women

Mustafa Sa'eed's relationships with European women are some of the most revealing aspects of his character in *Season of Migration to the North*. Each woman represents not only a personal conquest for him but also a deeper psychological struggle tied to colonial power, identity, and the sense of being a "stranger" in both the East and the West. Through these encounters, Tayeb Salih shows how Mustafa's brilliance and trauma coexist, making intimacy a battlefield for domination and revenge.

a. Ann Hammond

Ann Hammond is the first of Mustafa's lovers, a young woman filled with innocence and curiosity. Their relationship begins as a romantic affair but quickly turns into a destructive obsession. Mustafa's charm and intelligence fascinate her, but beneath this lies his calculated manipulation. He seduces her with exaggerated tales of the "mystical East," turning her fascination with difference into a weapon (Salih, 1966, p. 34). Ann's suicide marks the first tragic consequence of Mustafa's internal conflict. She becomes a victim of his psychological war against colonial stereotypes, as he later admits, "I was like a thirsty desert, and they were rain that never came" (Salih, 1966, p. 38). This metaphor reflects not only Mustafa's emotional emptiness but also his futile attempt to fill the void created by his alienation.

b. Sheila Greenwood

Sheila Greenwood's relationship with Mustafa reflects another dimension of his character his growing coldness and detachment. While Ann represented innocence, Sheila

embodies desire and adventure. She is attracted to Mustafa's "dark charm" and the aura of danger around him (Salih, 1966, p. 41). Yet, Mustafa treats her as another experiment in his revenge against European women. Their encounters are brief but intense, filled with Mustafa's awareness that he is "both the hunter and the hunted." Sheila's eventual despair highlights how Mustafa's relationships are never about love but about power and the need to reverse colonial hierarchies emotionally.

c. Isabella Seymour

Isabella Seymour, a married woman, is yet another tragic figure drawn to Mustafa's intellect and mystery. Her fascination with him represents the allure of the "exotic stranger" in British society. Mustafa's seduction of Isabella is colder, more deliberate, he describes her as *"a ripe fruit that fell into my hands" (Salih, 1966, p. 45)*. Their relationship ends in destruction, mirroring Mustafa's inability to find meaning in connection. Isabella's suicide adds to the series of tragedies surrounding him, turning Mustafa into both victim and perpetrator of the same emotional violence he claims to resist.

d. Jean Morris

Jean Morris is not only a woman Mustafa loves and hates , she becomes a mirror that forces him to confront what Julia Kristeva (1991) calls *"the stranger within ourselves"* (p. 191). For Kristeva, the stranger is not only the foreigner we meet outside, but also the unfamiliar part of our own identity the side we repress, fear, or fail to understand. In his obsession with Jean, Mustafa encounters that inner stranger. He projects all his pain, humiliation, and desire for power onto her. Through Jean, he tries to dominate what he cannot control within himself. He confesses, "I loved her, and I hated her, just as I loved and hated myself" (Salih, 1966, p. 140). This line captures Kristeva's idea that the

foreigner is “a division of the self,” an inner conflict between what is known and what is rejected (Kristeva, 1991, p. 191).

Jean’s rejection of Mustafa awakens this buried conflict. She refuses to see him as the charming, mysterious man he pretends to be; instead, she exposes his fragility. “You’re not a man, you’re a lie,” she tells him (Salih, 1966, p. 48). That moment is more than humiliation , it is the collapse of his mask. Jean forces him to see the stranger within the broken, displaced self he has long denied. Kristeva (1991) argues that this moment of confrontation with our inner foreignness can lead to either self-understanding or destruction. In Mustafa’s case, it leads to the latter. His inability to accept that internal stranger drives him to violence. When he kills Jean, he symbolically tries to destroy the part of himself that feels alien, inferior, and powerless. “I killed her in a moment of truth” (Salih, 1966, p. 50) , this confession reveals not only guilt but also a desperate attempt to silence the unbearable voice of the stranger inside him.

Thus, Jean Morris becomes more than a lover or a symbol of the West. She becomes the human form of Mustafa’s internal division. Through her, Tayeb Salih dramatizes Kristeva’s insight that the greatest exile is not geographical but psychological , being a stranger *to oneself.*

1.1.7 Mustafa Sa’eed’s Trial

Mustafa Sa’eed’s trial following the murder of Jean Morris stands as one of the most revealing moments in *Season of Migration to the North*. The courtroom transforms into a symbolic arena where Mustafa is judged not only for his crime but also for his difference , his race, his identity, and his challenge to colonial norms. Throughout the trial, Mustafa becomes the object of public fascination and moral scrutiny. The British press refers to him as “the black Englishman,” “the savage genius,” and “the sexual enigma” (Salih, 1966, p.

35). These labels expose the colonial gaze that seeks to categorize and control him. Mustafa is no longer seen as an individual but as a representation of the African stranger , a being both exotic and threatening, both intelligent and dangerous. Julia Kristeva (1991) explains that the stranger "is always judged before being understood" (p. 13). This captures Mustafa's experience perfectly: his trial becomes less about justice and more about reaffirming the social and racial hierarchies of the colonial world. The British courtroom is not a neutral space; it is a stage where the power of the West defines, interprets, and disciplines the African man who dares to cross its boundaries.

When Mustafa finally speaks, his words reveal his awareness of this role: "I am no Othello. I am a lie" (Salih, 1966, p. 33). Through this confession, he recognizes how he has been turned into a symbol the exotic stranger, the dark lover, the tragic intellectual. He understands that the image society projects onto him has replaced his real identity. Kristeva's (1991) concept of the "stranger within" illuminates this moment: Mustafa's internal division mirrors the judgment imposed upon him. He is alienated both from himself and from the world around him. The judge's statement , "a noble mind gone astray" (Salih, 1966, p. 36) , This captures the contradiction of Africans being perceived as outsiders. Mustafa is praised for his intelligence but criticized for his innate qualities. His punishment is softened not out of compassion but because his strangeness fascinates and unsettles his judges. He becomes both a spectacle and a warning proof that the African can imitate European brilliance but can never fully belong to it.

As Kristeva (1991) notes, "The stranger lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity" (p. 5). Mustafa's trial exposes this truth about the West. In judging him, the British society also judges its own fears , the fear of the other, and of the parts of itself it refuses to see. The courtroom thus becomes a mirror, reflecting the instability of a world built on the illusion of superiority and order.

Even after the decision is reached, Mustafa's isolation endures. His release from prison does not provide him freedom, but rather increases his sense of displacement. He exits the courtroom as what Kristeva (1991) refers to as "the eternal outsider" (p. 15) , a man without a homeland, caught between two worlds, and forever burdened with the burden of being the stranger.

1.2 The Character Analysis of the Stranger in Adichie's *Americanah*

1.2.1 Ifemelu's Experience as a Stranger

Having examined Mustafa Sa'eed's experiences as a stranger navigating Europe, we now turn to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and the story of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who moves to the United States to pursue education and better opportunities. Unlike Mustafa, whose strangeness is shaped by historical and colonial dynamics, Ifemelu's outsider status emerges through everyday social interactions, cultural differences, and racial identity. From her first days in America, she confronts challenges of belonging, identity, and adaptation struggles that are both personal and reflective of broader immigrant experiences (Kristeva, 1991, p. 12).

1.2.2 Hair as a Marker of Identity and Cultural Connection

One of the earliest symbols of Ifemelu's connection to her Nigerian roots is her hair. Hair, in black culture, carries deep significance as a marker of identity, pride, and heritage. Memories of her mother styling her hair link her to home:

> It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration. Her father called it a crown of glory. 'Is it your real hair?' strangers would ask, and then reach out to touch it reverently (Adichie, 2013, p.7).

These memories reinforce her cultural identity but also highlight her position as a stranger in the United States. Kristeva notes that "memories of origins whether they concern the mother, the family, the native country, or any primary group are at the heart of the stranger's identity" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 12). For Ifemelu, her hair becomes a site where cultural pride and social alienation intersect.

1.2.4 Aunty Uju and the Pressure to Conform

Aunty Uju, Ifemelu's aunt who plays a maternal role in her life in America, introduces her to the harsh realities of fitting into a society that often judges her by appearance. Upon arriving in the United States, Ifemelu faces subtle but constant pressures to adjust to the norms of American society, and her hair quickly becomes a focal point of this struggle. Aunty Uju advises her bluntly: "If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (Adichie, 2013, p.8). Ifemelu's sarcastic response "If there are no doctors with braided hair in America?" (Adichie, 2013, p.9), reveals her inner conflict: she wants to assert her cultural identity, yet she is also aware of the practical demands of succeeding in a foreign environment. Aunty Uju's advice continues:

> You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed (Adichie, 2013, p.10).

This guidance underscores a tension that many strangers experience: the need to negotiate between authenticity and adaptation. Kristeva captures this struggle perfectly, noting that "to become integrated into a society, the stranger is forced to relinquish part of his identity" (Kristeva, 1991, p.14). In Ifemelu's case, straightening her hair represents a small but significant compromise—an outward adjustment that masks the internal challenge of maintaining her cultural self. Her reaction to Aunty Uju's advice also reflects resistance. Ifemelu's humor and questioning of the rule highlight her awareness that the expectation

to conform is not natural, but socially imposed. This dynamic illustrates Kristeva's idea of the "stranger within," where the individual must constantly balance their internal identity with the pressures of the surrounding society: "The stranger is both the one who is excluded and the one who is within us, who exists in our very core" (Kristeva, 1991, p.5). Through this early experience with hair and societal expectations, Ifemelu begins to negotiate her place as a stranger in America, learning that maintaining her identity requires careful navigation between cultural pride and practical survival. Hair, then, is not just a personal choice , it is a marker of belonging, resistance, and adaptation.

1.2.5 The African Hair Salon: Connection and Estrangement

Ifemelu's struggle with her hair does not end with her experiences alongside Aunty Uju; instead, it deepens as she begins to navigate her life in America on her own. While Aunty Uju represents the pressure to conform—to straighten, to blend in, to survive, Ifemelu's later visit to the African hair-braiding salon reveals the other side of this struggle: the longing for connection and cultural continuity. Having once witnessed how assimilation could strip away a woman's sense of self, Ifemelu now seeks comfort among women who share her language, her rhythms, and her roots. Yet even in this familiar space, she remains marked by distance. As Kristeva (1991) notes, the stranger "seeks both closeness and distance, belonging and exile" (p. 7). The salon, like her own identity, becomes both home and exile a place where she can belong and still feel like a stranger.

Ifemelu's visits to the African hair salon in Trenton, New Jersey, are emotionally significant. The salon provides her with a momentary sense of home and community, connecting her with other African women who share similar experiences: "She was in Princeton, in that rarefied, affected space… that a woman who could come from somewhere would need somewhere to braid her hair." (Adichie, 2013, p.13) Through interactions with

Aisha, the braider, Ifemelu engages in conversations about relationships, culture, and life in America for Africans, which highlight both shared understanding and the challenges of being foreign: "Aisha asked, 'You Igbo?' 'No.' 'Why you no marry Igbo man?' … 'My man, he Igbo. I want marry him so I get my papers.'" (Adichie, 2013, p.14) , Kristeva captures this duality, describing the foreigner as someone constantly seeking belonging yet reminded of their outsider status (Kristeva, 1991, p.8). The salon becomes a microcosm of Ifemelu's life in America: a place of connection, yet simultaneously a reminder of estrangement.

1.2.6 Ifemelu's Blog and Racial Identity

Ifemelu's blog, *"Raceteenth: or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black,"* becomes her main channel of self-expression a digital space where she tries to make sense of her place as a stranger in America. Through her posts, she transforms private confusion into public conversation, reclaiming her identity in a society that constantly imposes new labels on her. The blog becomes, as critic Suman Gupta (2009) notes, "a transnational diary of cultural translation," where Ifemelu negotiates between her Nigerian background and the racial realities of the United States (p. 87).

When she writes, "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black" (Adichie, 2013, p. 273), she captures one of her most painful realizations that race is not a universal truth but a social construct she has been forced to inhabit. Before coming to America, she had never thought of herself in racial terms; it was migration that imposed "blackness" upon her. As Chinua Achebe (1988) once observed, the African's encounter with the West often means "being renamed and redefined by others" (p. 10) , a fate Ifemelu experiences firsthand. Kristeva's (1991) theory helps illuminate this transformation. She writes that the stranger "must speak in a borrowed language, always aware that words are never truly his own" (p. 16). Similarly, Ifemelu must

learn to navigate American racial discourse, adopting its vocabulary and sensitivities in order to make herself understood. Writing in this "borrowed language" becomes both an act of survival and defiance: through her blog, she turns the foreignness of her voice into her strength. Her blog posts half confession, half social commentary reveal her dual position as both insider and outsider. She observes the world of race and identity from a distance, yet her insights come from living through it.

As Kristeva (1991) puts it, "the stranger is both participant and observer, integrated and excluded" (p. 7). Ifemelu's writing reflects this statement; she belongs to neither Africa nor America completely. Still, by speaking openly about race, immigration, and belonging, she forges a new identity that exists *between* these worlds. In this sense, her blog becomes a home of her own making a space where alienation turns into authorship, and silence into power.

1.2.7 Romantic Relationships and Cultural Estrangement

After giving voice to her experiences through her blog, Ifemelu's search for belonging moves into a more intimate space—her relationships. Writing allows her to speak as a stranger; love, however, forces her to feel it. Through her connections with Curt and Blaine, Adichie explores how affection and identity intersect, and how love itself can become another mirror of cultural displacement. Even in moments of closeness, Ifemelu remains at a distance, always aware that the borders between worlds ;Black and white, African and American,exist not only in society but within her own heart. Her romantic relationships reveal another dimension of her experience as a stranger, how intimacy and alienation coexist.

a. Curt: The Illusion of Belonging

Curt, her white American boyfriend, represents both comfort and contradiction.

He is kind, wealthy, and genuinely in love with her, but their relationship is shadowed by racial and cultural distance. Through Curt, Ifemelu enters spaces of privilege she could never access alone, exclusive parties, job opportunities, and social respectability. Yet beneath this privilege lies an invisible wall. Adichie writes, "She did not entirely belong in his world of white privilege, even though he welcomed her into it" (Adichie, 2013, p. 289). Curt's affection cannot erase the subtle racism and constant self-awareness that mark her life in America. He tells her not to "see race in everything," but for Ifemelu, that is impossible (Adichie, 2013, p. 291). His inability to understand her lived reality reinforces her position as an outsider, even in love. As Kristeva (1991) suggests, the stranger is "accepted but never understood" (p. 10), and Curt's well-meaning ignorance captures exactly that.

b. Blaine: Familiar Yet Distant

after that we have Blain . Her relationship with Blaine, an African-American academic, offers a different kind of connection, intellectual, political, and rooted in shared racial experience. At first, it seems that Ifemelu has finally found someone who understands her, someone who speaks the same language of race and belonging. Yet their closeness also exposes new forms of distance. Blaine's life revolves around activism and moral precision, while Ifemelu prefers a more personal, ironic lens. When she skips a protest he considers important, their argument exposes the gap between theory and lived experience. Adichie writes, "He did not understand that she was tired of explanations, tired of self-censoring, tired of being Black in America" (Adichie, 2013, p. 333).

Even among those who look like her, Ifemelu feels apart. Kristeva (1991) describes this perfectly xhen she said : "Even when among others who appear like him, the stranger feels the unbridgeable distance of difference" (p. 9). Blaine represents familiarity, but not home.

Through both relationships, Ifemelu learns that belonging cannot be found in another person. Whether with Curt or Blaine, she remains aware of her dual consciousness, both

Nigerian and not, both insider and outsider. Her realization echoes Kristeva's idea of "the intimate revolt of the self against all fixed identities" (1991, p. 22). Love, like place, cannot anchor her.

1.2.8 College Experiences and the Third Space

After the ups and downs of her romantic relationships, Ifemelu turns her focus inward, searching for stability and meaning in her academic life. University becomes more than just a place to learn, it is a space where she begins to understand herself as a stranger. Having felt the limits of belonging through love, she now faces the quieter but equally real pressures of adapting to a new culture. The university environment, with its social hierarchies, racial expectations, and unspoken rules, tests her sense of self in ways both subtle and profound. Here, Ifemelu discovers that estrangement isn't always something outside of her, it can live in the way she speaks, the pauses she takes, and the silences she carries. This part of her journey captures Kristeva's idea that the stranger is not only someone cut off from a homeland, but someone who must constantly negotiate the boundaries between self and other, even within her own mind.

Ifemelu's university years mark an important stage in her journey as a stranger. In this liminal space, she is neither fully Nigerian nor fully American, and her accent, hair, and mannerisms become subtle sites where her identity is constantly negotiated. The pressure to fit in while remaining true to herself is heightened in academic and social environments that are predominantly white and shaped by unspoken norms.

At one point, she adopts an American accent to be taken seriously: "She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the t's, the creamy roll of the r's, the sliding of the words" (Adichie, 2013, p. 213). Yet this borrowed voice leaves her feeling hollow, as if a part of her identity has been muted. Eventually, she

abandons the accent, stating, “I like my real voice. It feels like me” (Adichie, 2013, p. 216). This simple act of reclaiming her natural voice is symbolic of a larger process: embracing her strangeness as part of herself rather than something to hide.

Kristeva’s insight into the stranger illuminates this experience. She notes that “the stranger ceases to be a threat and becomes a revelation of the self” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 20). For Ifemelu, college becomes a space where she confronts both external and internal forms of estrangement, racism, cultural expectations, and the silent judgment of peers, as well as the inner tension of negotiating who she is in relation to the world around her. Through these experiences, she learns that being a stranger is not only about geographic displacement but also about self-discovery, reflection, and acceptance.

Finally , Mustafa Sa’eed and Ifemelu both experience life as Africans who are strangers, moving through worlds that both want them and push them away. But the way they deal with this situation is very different. Mustafa reacts to the Western gaze by turning his sense of alienation into control and even destruction, leading to the tragic fate of Jean Morris. Ifemelu, however, uses her strangeness to express herself, reflect, and try to understand her place in the world. Her return to Nigeria, though complicated, shows a conscious acceptance of her mixed identity rather than giving in to it. Throughout her journey, simple but meaningful things her hair, the African hair salon, and her blog anchor her sense of self. Her hair connects her to Nigeria, the salon gives her moments of belonging and shared culture, and her blog lets her express her experiences in a society that often tries to label her. Each of these experiences shows her dual position: tied to her roots, but always aware of her strangeness in America.

Kristeva’s ideas help highlight the contrast between Mustafa and Ifemelu. For Mustafa, the stranger is a haunting figure, stuck between two worlds with no real home. For Ifemelu,

the stranger acts like a mirror, helping her see who she really is. As Kristeva writes, “The foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity” (1991, p. 1). Both characters remind us that identity is never simple, and that belonging often requires courage to accept being different, realizing that being a stranger can also reveal our true selves.

Chapter two: The Homecoming: The Return of the Protagonists to their Homeland in *Salih's Season of Migration to the North* and Adichie's *Americanah*

This chapter explores the theme of homecoming in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. Both Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu return to their homelands; Sudan and Nigeria, after spending time abroad, and they face challenges in readjusting to familiar places that now feel strange. Using Julia Kristeva's idea of the uncanny(das unheimlich), which describes something that is both familiar and unfamiliar, we can better understand their experiences. Their time abroad changes them deeply, making it difficult to fully belong either to the country they left or the one they return to. This chapter looks at how Mustafa and Ifemelu confront these feelings of estrangement and how their identities are shaped by the tension between the past and present, between home and the wider world.

2.1 Mustafa Sa'eed: The Uncanny Return to Sudan:

2.1.1 Returning to the Village

: Mustafa Sa'eed's return to Sudan after years in Europe is a deeply reflective and unsettling journey. The village, which should symbolize home and comfort, now appears alien, mirroring Mustafa's psychological dislocation. He observes

> I returned to a world of drowsy people, a world of the living dead. The people here live as though under hypnosis. They know nothing about the world beyond (Salih, 1966, p. 47).

This passage shows the stark transformation in Mustafa's perception pn his homeland while the village itself has not changed in reality, Mustafa's experiences abroad have reshaped his worldview, making familiar surroundings feel strange and disorienting.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the *unheimlich* is evident here: the uncanny arises when the familiar becomes unfamiliar, producing a profound sense of discomfort and alienation (Kristeva, 1991, p.182). Mustafa's disconnection is not only with the physical environment but also with the cultural practices and social norms he once understood intimately. He recalls:"I lived on the periphery of the real world" (Salih, 1966, p. 130). This sense of being on the margins illustrates the deep psychological impact of his experiences in Europe and the lingering effects of colonial influence. As Kristeva explains: "The foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder" (Kristeva, 1991, p.192).

Through this lens, Mustafa's homeland becomes a space of uncanny strangeness, where familiar rituals and customs feel distant and inaccessible. He experiences the village almost like a dream, reflecting his fractured sense of self:

> I felt I was in a strange dream, as though I were standing in the middle of a huge theatre. The people and the objects around me appeared like figments of my imagination, as though I had lived that moment before, that place before, but it was no longer part of me.(Salih, 1969, p. 58).

This passage highlights the surreal and theatrical nature of Mustafa's homecoming. The tension between his Europeanized identity and the Sudanese environment creates a deep inner conflict, illustrating the deep psychological and cultural challenges of returning to a homeland that has become unfamiliar.

2.1.2 Marriage to Hosna Bint Mahmoud

As Mustafa gradually reintegrates into village life, he finds that the familiar routines and communal gatherings no longer provide the comfort they once did. The village, once a

symbol of belonging, now feels unfamiliar , reflecting the internal distance created by his years in Europe. Even ordinary events, like a village meeting, become moments of disorientation, where the people and surroundings appear unreal, almost like figments of his imagination. In this space of subtle estrangement, Mustafa begins to encounter the personal and social expectations of his homeland, including the pressures of family, tradition, and relationships. It is within this context that his connection with Hosna Bint Mahmoud emerges,a relationship that is both deeply rooted in village custom and yet complicated by Mustafa's transformed identity.

Hosna Bint Mahmoud, a young woman from the village whose life is deeply intertwined with local customs and expectations. Their meeting is shaped by the rhythms of the village community, where family, tradition, and social standing play a central role in relationships. Mustafa, seeking to establish some connection with his homeland and to conform to societal norms after years in Europe, becomes engaged to Hosna. Their union, however, is more a reflection of social obligation than genuine intimacy. Mustafa acknowledges that his motivations are guided by a desire to fit in rather than by love: "I married Hosna, not out of love, but because I wanted to be like other men in the village, to have a wife and children... Yet, I was never able to truly belong" (Salih, 1969, p. 106)

Through this union, the tension between his Europeanized identity and the traditional world of his homeland becomes starkly visible. Hosna represents the familiar comforts of home and community, but Mustafa's internal dislocation prevents him from fully embracing that world. As Kristeva notes, the stranger is not only an outsider in society but also a presence within the self, creating a constant sense of unease (Kristeva, 1991, p.195). Mustafa's return, therefore, deepens his experience of being a stranger at home, highlighting the uncanny intersection of personal and cultural alienation.

2.1.3 The Secret Room: A Space of Dual Identity

Even as Mustafa tries to return to normal life in his village,attending meetings, interacting with neighbors, and taking part in everyday routines, he cannot escape the feeling that he no longer fully belongs. The familiar faces and customs of his homeland now seem distant and strange, a reflection of how profoundly his time in Europe has changed him. This internal tension aligns with Kristeva's idea that the foreigner exists within the self, creating an ongoing struggle between past and present identities (Kristeva, 1991, p.195). It is in his private, hidden spaces that this conflict becomes most apparent. The secret room in Mustafa's house, filled with remnants of his European life, symbolizes the constant negotiation between his Sudanese roots and the foreign identity he has brought back with him.

Mustafa's house holds a hidden room that reveals the deep tension within his identity. This secret room, filled with objects and furniture from his life in Europe, stands apart from the rest of his Sudanese home. The narrator describes:

> I pushed the door open and found myself face to face with a room that was alien to the rest of the house... It was as though I had stepped into a different world, one filled with the ghosts of the past (Salih, 1969, p.138).

This room shows how Mustafa's experiences abroad have left a mark on him, creating a constant pull between his Sudanese roots and his Europeanized self. Again ,Julia Kristeva's idea of exile helps explain this tension:

> Exile, for the one who endures it, is a disjunction. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping .(Kristeva, 1991, p.13).

The secret room becomes a kind of "moving train," a symbol of the constant shift in Mustafa's life where he cannot fully belong to either culture. Even familiar objects, like the English fireplace and Victorian chairs, feel strange in his Sudanese home:

> Lamp in hand, I went up to it. How ridiculous! A fireplace — imagine it! A real English fireplace with all the bits and pieces, above it a brass cowl and in front of it a quadrangular area tiled in green marble, with the mantelpiece of blue marble; on either side of the fireplace were two Victorian chairs covered in a figured silk material, while between them stood a round table with books and notebooks on it (Salih,1966, p.112).

The contrast between these European items and the Sudanese setting reflects Mustafa's divided self. The room is familiar and foreign at the same time, echoing Kristeva's idea of the uncanny (das unheimlich) where the known becomes strange. It is here that Mustafa faces the hidden parts of his identity, shaped by Europe and colonial encounters, which he cannot fully integrate into his life in Sudan.

2.1.4 The Afreet: The Inner Uncanny

Before encountering the afreet, Mustafa is already facing a deep struggle within himself. His experiences in Europe and his life in Sudan have created a tension between two worlds, making familiar surroundings feel strange and uncertain. This inner conflict turns ordinary moments into experiences that seem unreal or frightening. The afreet, then, is not just a supernatural figure, it represents the fears and confusion within Mustafa, showing how the uncanny can exist both outside and inside the self. His encounter with the afreet, a supernatural figure, reflects the deep unease he feels within himself. He recalls:

> I tell you that had the ground suddenly spit open and revealed an afreet standing before me, his eyes shooting out flames, I wouldn't have been more terrified. All of a sudden there came to me the ghastly, nightmarish feeling that we—the men grouped together in that

> room—were not a reality but merely some illusion”(Salih, 1966, p.74).

This terrifying vision is more than a ghostly story; it symbolizes the unfamiliar and conflicted parts of Mustafa’s own identity. His time abroad and the internalization of the Western gaze have created a sense of disconnection from himself and his homeland. As Julia Kristeva explains:

> In that unconscious, repressed yet active, the foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious—that 'improper' facet of our impossible 'own and proper.(Kristeva, 1991, p.191).

The afreet, therefore, represents the uncanny , the merging of external fear and internal uncertainty. Mustafa’s struggle is not only about fitting into society or returning home; it is also a confrontation with the hidden and unsettling aspects of his own self, shaped by the tension between his Sudanese roots and his European experiences.

In sum, Mustafa Sa’eed’s return to Sudan, his experiences of the uncanny from feeling estranged in his own village to the frightening presence of the afreet and the dual nature of his secret room all show the deep conflict between his Europeanized identity and his Sudanese roots. Even his death carries mysterious sense of the uncanny, leaving unanswered questions about belonging, identity, and whether one can ever truly reconcile with their homeland. Mustafa’s story, therefore, highlights the emotional and psychological challenges of returning home in a post-colonial context, where the familiar can feel strange, and the self becomes a place of constant tension and negotiation.

2.2 Ifemelu's return

Just as Mustafa Sa'eed's homecoming reveals the unsettling tension between his Europeanized identity and his Sudanese roots, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria demonstrates that the uncanny is not limited to post-colonial displacement alone. While Mustafa's estrangement is shaped by the cultural and psychological impacts of colonial encounters, Ifemelu's sense of alienation emerges from personal transformation and global mobility. Both experiences show that home is never purely familiar; it is filtered through the lens of the self, shaped by experiences abroad, and often experienced as slightly "other." In this way, the uncanny becomes a shared language of displacement, whether in the post-colonial village of Mustafa or the transnational cityscape of Ifemelu, revealing how identity and belonging are constantly negotiated in the face of change.

2.2.1 Stranger in her own home:

Ifemelu's return to Nigeria after years in the United States hits her with a deep sense of disconnection. She arrives in Lagos, a city she once knew intimately, only to find it strangely altered or perhaps she herself has changed so much that nothing feels familiar anymore. The bustling streets, vendors calling out their wares, dust swirling in the heat all the sights and sounds she grew up with now seem slightly alien. She confesses to her friends:

> I came home and it was not my home anymore. The streets, the people, even the smells—they were the same, but not (Adichie, 2013, p. 466).

This statement captures her inner turmoil. Everything appears familiar, yet something is off. Greetings from old neighbors feel hollow, traffic jams grate on her nerves, and even the familiar smell of fried plantains and diesel fumes stirs discomfort rather than nostalgia.

2.2.2 The Uncanny in Ifemelu's Homecoming

Julia Kristeva's concept of the *unheimlich*, or the uncanny, offers a useful lens for understanding Ifemelu's experience. Kristeva (1991) describes the uncanny as the unsettling moment when something deeply familiar turns unfamiliar, when home itself becomes strange (p. 182). This is precisely what Ifemelu feels upon returning to Lagos a mix of recognition and alienation. Her homeland is still there, but it no longer fits her sense of self.

Her situation reflects the condition of many returnees whose identities have been reshaped by migration. Having absorbed new values and rhythms abroad, they come back to find that "home" no longer mirrors who they have become (Kristeva, 1991). For Ifemelu, the uncanny is not found in ghosts or secrets, but in the quiet shock of seeing her childhood streets through changed eyes (Adichie, 2013). Studies from organizations like the Migration Policy Institute (2017) have noted that such cultural disorientation is common: more than half of long-term emigrants experience the same uneasy sense of displacement upon return. Ifemelu's discomfort turns this statistic into a living truth (Adichie, 2013; Kristeva, 1991).

2.2.3 Cultural Disconnection and Identity Tension

Ifemelu's sense of disconnection reaches far beyond the streets and buildings of Lagos. It seeps into the daily social rhythms of the city. People talk in quick bursts, laced with slang she once knew by heart. Now those words feel off, like echoes from a life she left behind. They greet each other with warm slaps on the back or sharp jokes that once drew her in. But after years in America, her diasporic self shaped by quiet nods and polite distances—clashes with Nigeria's bold social rules. This rift shows in simple moments. A chat at a roadside tea stall turns stiff when she fumbles for the right response. In the

bustling markets, haggling over tomatoes feels like a dance she has forgotten the steps to. Even a friend's easy hug lands awkwardly, pulling her further from the crowd.

She puts it into words during one quiet moment: "Everything felt familiar, yet it was like I had been dropped into someone else's memory of Lagos, not mine" (Adichie, 2013, p. 466). Back in Nigeria after fifteen years away, Ifemelu grapples with this shift. Her time abroad has built a new skin—one that fits American habits but rubs uncomfortably against home. This return stirs up questions shared by many returnees: how does a life split between worlds remake the heart?

Kristeva's (1991) idea of the *"foreigner within"* sheds light on this struggle. She argues that the outsider lives inside us all a voice that questions what we call home, that shakes our comfort, turns known places into puzzles, and twists our own image in the mirror (p. 192). For Ifemelu, this insight cuts deep. The strangeness comes not only from the changes around her, but also from within. It brews in the space where old roots tangle with new branches, blending the world's pull with her inner divide.

2.2.4 Love and Estrangement: Ifemelu and Obinze

Obinze, Ifemelu's first love, is one of the most important figures in *Americanah*. Intelligent, thoughtful, and quietly ambitious, he connects Ifemelu to her past while also reflecting what she has lost after years abroad. Unlike Ifemelu, who builds a life in America, Obinze's journey takes him to the United Kingdom, where he faces the hardships of being an undocumented migrant (Adichie, 2013). Even during their long separation, he stays emotionally tied to her, representing the link between memory and the transformed self that emerges through migration.

When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, her reunion with Obinze carries both longing and uncertainty. What once felt natural between them now seems filled with distance and silence. Adichie captures this emotional tension with precision: “She felt herself walking into a remembered place that had been altered” (Adichie, 2013, p. 472). Their meeting is at once familiar and strange, echoing Julia Kristeva’s (1991) idea of “the uncanny stranger within ourselves” (p. 191). Ifemelu recognizes Obinze, yet she no longer fully recognizes the version of herself that exists around him.

Their renewed relationship mirrors the deeper theme of estrangement that shapes Ifemelu’s return. Love, which should offer comfort, instead reveals how migration has changed both of them. Obinze, now married and socially settled, represents a Nigeria built on conventions and appearances one that Ifemelu can no longer fully belong to. Their connection feels both real and impossible, expressing Kristeva’s (1991) claim that “the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity” (p. 1).

Through Obinze, Ifemelu faces the tension of belonging: the deep wish to return home and the realization that true return is impossible. Their love becomes a mirror of her divided self the woman she once was and the woman shaped by her time in America. Even in love, she remains partly a stranger to herself, caught between nostalgia and change. Adichie turns this tension into a quiet truth: Ifemelu’s homecoming is not an ending but a reckoning. It is only by accepting this inner conflict that she begins to understand the complex, nature of her identity (Adichie, 2013; Kristeva, 1991).

2.2.5 Ifemelu’s Unresolved Identity and the Limits of Homecoming

Although Ifemelu’s reunion with Obinze seems to promise closure, it instead deepens her unease. Coming home does not bring the peace she imagined; rather, it exposes the distance between who she was and who she has become. Lagos, once her anchor, now

feels like a reflection she can no longer fully recognise. The conversations, the noise, and even the laughter remind her of belonging—but one that now feels slightly out of reach. Through Ifemelu, Adichie (2013) explores how migration reshapes identity so profoundly that the idea of "home" becomes uncertain—something both longed for and feared. Critics note that her return is "a complex and contested experience" rather than a simple reunion (Müller & Stefánsson, 2021).

By the end of *Americanah*, Ifemelu's homecoming remains unresolved. She has returned, yet her sense of belonging is incomplete. The city, the people, and even her love for Obinze hold both warmth and distance. This reflects a broader truth of migration that leaving home transforms not only how one sees the world but also how one sees oneself. Ifemelu's story reveals the limits of homecoming in a postcolonial world, where identity is never fixed but always shifting. The familiar becomes strange, and the stranger becomes part of the self. Adichie (2013) closes Ifemelu's journey not with certainty but with understanding: home, she learns, is not a place to which one simply returns it is something one must continually redefine. Researchers emphasise that return migration often triggers "an identity re-formation rather than a resolution" (Osinimu Alao, 2024).

To conclude , Both Mustafa Sa'eed in *Season of Migration to the North* and Ifemelu in *Americanah* embody the deep emotional and psychological struggles of return. Their journeys reveal that homecoming, far from being a peaceful resolution, often awakens an uncanny sense of estrangement. Mustafa's death in the Nile and Ifemelu's uneasy reconciliation with Lagos both symbolize the same truth—the impossibility of fully belonging after crossing borders, whether geographical or psychological. Julia Kristeva's reflections in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) echo through both narratives: "The foreigner lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity" (p. 191).

Through kristeva’s idea of the uncanny, both characters stand as strangers not only to their societies but also to themselves. Their returns do not heal the split created by migration; instead, they expose it. In this way, Tayeb Salih and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie both portray home as a contradiction , familiar yet unreachable, intimate yet distant. The journey home becomes a confrontation with one’s fragmented self, where belonging is no longer a place but an ever-shifting state of mind.

V.Conclusion

This research has explored the affinities between Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), with a focus on how both novels depict the figure of the foreigner. Through our study, we have tried to show how these authors represent the experience of being a stranger, and how this experience is both social and psychological. Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) has been the main theoretical framework for this analysis, and it helped us understand how migrants and foreigners negotiate belonging, alienation, and identity in unfamiliar spaces. The idea of the stranger is not just about someone coming from a different place or culture; it's about someone whose presence challenges social norms, whose identity is shaped by exclusion as well as inclusion, and whose existence is both within and apart from the society around them (Kristeva, 1991; Simmel, 1908).

First, we looked at the experiences and identities of Mustafa Sa'eed and Ifemelu, who both stand as embodiments of the foreigner. Mustafa's experience in Europe and Ifemelu's in America reveal how outsiders struggle to define themselves in societies that often refuse to see them as fully human or equal. Their estrangement is not only shaped by prejudice and discrimination but also internalised, making their alienation lasting and profound. Kristeva's notion of the foreigner as both accepted and rejected is especially helpful here, because it explains how these characters can be part of a society and yet remain deeply outside it at the same time (Kristeva, 1991). Mustafa and Ifemelu both show the dual nature of belonging and alienation, and how this tension produces a fragmented self. Their experiences remind us that being a stranger is rarely simple; it is complicated, continuous, and often painful.

Furthermore, the return or homecoming of these characters also highlights the paradoxical nature of being a stranger. Neither Mustafa's return to Sudan nor Ifemelu's to Nigeria resolves their feelings of estrangement. In fact, these homecomings often deepen their alienation. Bhabha (1994) refers to this as the uncanny—the strange within the familiar, or unheimlich—where even a place that should be "home" feels foreign. Kristeva (1991) also points out that the stranger's sense of belonging is never fully stable; it is always mediated by both internal perceptions and external social conditions. Mustafa and Ifemelu confront the tension between their past and present, between self and society, and between home and exile, showing that identity is always in negotiation, never fixed.

The novels also show how the stranger's experience is relational and influenced by society. Simmel (1908) emphasizes that the stranger is part of the group but always at some distance, which gives them a unique perspective. Similarly, Lähdesmäki (2017) notes that the stranger's identity is constantly constructed through social interactions and personal reflection. Both Mustafa and Ifemelu exemplify this dynamic. They are neither fully insiders nor fully outsiders, but somewhere in between, negotiating their belonging while constantly aware of their difference. This tension shapes every aspect of their identities, from how they see themselves to how they interact with others. Their experiences highlight the way social exclusion and internalized alienation work together to create the complex condition of the stranger.

Migration, movement, and cross-cultural experiences also play an important role in shaping their identities. Modern societies are highly mobile, and the novels reflect this reality (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Mustafa's time in Europe and Ifemelu's in America expose them to multiple cultural and social expectations, forcing them to balance dual or hybrid identities (Vertovec, 2009). Kristeva (1991) explains that this balancing act is never finished; the stranger's identity and sense of belonging are always in flux. What

these novels show is that alienation isn't only about physical displacement—it is also psychological and cultural. Mustafa and Ifemelu are not just dealing with new social environments; they are also confronting themselves, their pasts, and how they are perceived. This adds layers to their experiences of estrangement and highlights the ongoing challenges of being a stranger.

Another significant point is how these novels explore the idea of the "stranger within." Even in familiar surroundings, Mustafa and Ifemelu feel estranged. Kristeva (1991) argues that the stranger is both part of society and separate from it, and these characters show that very clearly. The novels depict how internalized alienation intersects with external exclusion, creating a sense of constant negotiation and uncertainty. Homecoming does not automatically bring belonging or comfort. Instead, it shows that identity and belonging are relational and complex, and that the foreigner's struggle is ongoing, not temporary.

Finally , the African stranger in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Americanah* is a figure caught between worlds, constantly negotiating identity, belonging, and alienation. By using Kristeva's theory, this research has highlighted how these protagonists embody the contradictions of the foreigner and the uncanny, both in their external experiences and inner conflicts. Their dual existence—marked by a tension between wanting to belong and feeling rejected—reflects the broader struggles of postcolonial identity and the lasting effects of migration on the self. The novels demonstrate that the stranger is not merely a marginal figure; they illuminate the mechanisms by which societies define membership, inclusion, and difference (Simmel, 1908; Bhabha, 1994).

To conclude , although this research focused on the main points of comparison, there are still many directions for further study. Future research could explore other perspectives, such as how migration affects language, communication, or even environmental factors in shaping identity. Nevertheless, this study provides a foundation for understanding the experience of the stranger in literature, showing how alienation, dual identity, and the paradox of homecoming are central to postcolonial narratives. By centering the stranger, the research highlights both the internal and external dimensions of human experience, and the ongoing negotiation between self and society that defines the foreigner in contemporary literature.

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