

Becoming Black and African: Nigerian Diasporic Transformations of Racial and Ethnic Identities in the United States

by

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Abstract

This paper presents US-based Nigerian Diaspora artists' cultural productions as offering dynamic fictional yet real/realistic lived experiences and perspectives on becoming in the African Diaspora – racially, ethnically, and culturally – in light of the shockingly difficult conditions created by racialism in America. Nigerian immigrant characters in Nigerian immigrant artists Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Rahman Oladigbolu's *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters*, and the Wowo Boyz' YouTube channel represent this shock of the falsehood of a post-racial America and the reality of the struggles caused by being racially, as well as ethnically, discriminated against. They also reveal various ways that African immigrants diasporize towards or away from Blackness or Africanness as a result of accepting, or rejecting, Black and African identities.

Introduction

“I must say that before I went to the US I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the US whenever Africa came up people turned to me, never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African.”

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story”

“The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America.”

– Ifemelu, in Adichie’s *Americanah*

Becoming Black and African in the United States are transformative experiences that contemporary Nigerian and other African voluntary immigrants must sojourner and come to acknowledge in their own terms as they learn the socio-political realities of existing in their new hostland. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one example, and a world-renowned Nigerian Diaspora cultural producer, whose numerous transnational novels and short stories do the work of shaping meaning about what it is to be Nigerian in the world. In the epigraphs of this article, Adichie achieves this through a public lecture, providing her own experiences of becoming “African” when coming to the United States, and through the journey of *Americanah*’s protagonist, Ifemelu, in learning to be “Black” in the United States, respectively. She demonstrates ways that the United States’ imposed Eurocentric racialization and ethnicization (Black, African) of African¹ people’s identities shift their perspectives of the world and their place in it. They are forced to negotiate these culturally and politically determined identities vis à vis their own ethnic or national identities that they arrive with (e.g. Igbo). Experiences of racism and xenophobia (or even Afrophobia, “a perceived or actual fear/contempt or bias against Black people” that is a symptom/function of internalized racism)², feelings of belonging and community, as well as learning US American history and African American history and culture provide profound context to empathetically understand how Blackness and Africanness are ascribed to one’s body and one’s everyday existence. At the same time, being labeled as African or Black and accepting the terms into their individual or shared cultural values also plays a significant role in how members of the Nigerian Diaspora contribute to national and global formations of African Diaspora identity.

This article explores these themes of racial and ethnic identity as they emerged from content analysis of Nigerian Diaspora cultural productions. The narratives of fictional Nigerian immigrants, drawn from real/realistic lived experiences, act as and constitute a case study to reveal the transformations of their, and others’, racial and ethnic identity as a result of leaving a neocolonial Nigeria for what they discover is a highly racialized and culturally hegemonic White supremacist United States. Like other members of the African Diaspora, their relationship to their hostland society and others within their hostland greatly influences the way they process, understand, and negotiate its structures of systemic racism and then again with how they relate back to their homeland, Nigeria. Notions of Blackness and Africanness become identity tropes that this 1st generation (immigrant) voluntary diaspora to the US must negotiate as a result of racialization and ethnicization of Black and African bodies in the United States.

For instance, in the film *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters*, the protagonist – Sade – comes to terms with a highly racist and xenophobic United States and uses this knowledge to better understand the predicament of her brothers and sisters back in Nigeria. She realizes that, compared to her African American brothers and sisters, Nigerians sell themselves into enslavement by choosing to come to the United States (Oladigbolu). They must internally war between racialized/ethnicized and cultural identities which at times can create tension, and at times be fluidly determined, exposing them to the “double consciousness” within one’s soul that William Edward Burghardt Du Bois envisioned about the multiplicity of factors constituting Africanness in the lived experiences of African Americans (and many other Africans in the world) (Du Bois). These experiences, along with the intentional, innate, or lessened expression of cultural heritage, point to the process of diasporization and how that manifests specifically to Nigerians, but more generally to Black immigrants to the United States.

This article reveals evidence from content analysis of three Nigerian Diaspora cultural productions by immigrant cultural producers: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*, Rahman Oladigbolu’s *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters*, and the Wowo Boyz’s YouTube comedy sketch, “Sensitivity Training”. Cultural representations of racialized or ethnicized identities are drawn from those bodies of work, and samples are used to support a thesis arguing that the cultural identities of members of the Nigerian Diaspora are transformed due to the imposition of Black and African identity markers and the conditions that lead to this mentally and physically enduring process. The cultural producers are able to use the fictional stories of their protagonists and their communities as vehicles to integrate and represent imagery of the producers’ real contexts and encounters. By unearthing these experiences through fictional antidotes, the producers contribute evidence of their community’s Black experiences to a cultural repository of the larger representation of African Diaspora lived experiences – especially to notions of Black diversity in the US and globally. They are able to create agency for themselves, and others who relate to their narratives, by providing first-hand narratives of diverse experiences of race and racism.

Evidence of these connections between the cultural producers and their cultural productions are made evident through personal (author collected) and public interviews; moreover, this article focuses primarily on how they emerge within the cultural productions. An example can be seen – to take Adichie’s experience further – in an interview on the 2016 US election where Adichie tells *The American Spectator*’s editor-in-chief, “I’m sorry, but as a white man, you don’t get to define what racism is,” when he rejects her objectively evidenced and subjectively supported (as a Black woman) intersectional perspectives about racism during President Trump’s presidential campaign (BBC *Newsnight*).

She understands that someone who benefits from the effects of White supremacy and patriarchy cannot define the experience of racism, and she is unapologetic in explaining this both to her co-guest and to the public. This understanding comes from learning to become Black as well as African, where she previously identified as Igbo or Nigerian, and then deciding that this identity is not only hers but one that she must fight alongside her new community to defend, represent, and provide solutions towards liberation from racism/White Supremacy.

Immigration laws, illegally executed orders, the negative socialization of immigrant populations – especially African/Black, Muslim, and Latino/a – and inequality of entrance criteria for visas from countries of the West versus the Global South play into the violent, traumatic, and dangerous effects of the United States’ racist and extremely hierarchal system. Despite current and consistent political action to place a chokehold on the existing immigration system,³ many new African immigrants come to the United States every day. They come as Jamaican, Black Brit, Senegalese, Eritrean, Shri Lankan, Afro-Brazilian, Puerto Rican, Ghanaian, and the list goes on. As this transnational and transcultural journey begins, they enter a de facto system of racism that doesn’t always “show for face”⁴ – its character is often omnipresent yet latent and hard to see – upon one’s arrival from whichever continental African space to the new. For instance, *In America*’s Sade develops feelings of imprisonment and loneliness as a result of her time fighting for legal residency in the United States. It led her to recognizing the extraordinarily strong ties between US African and continental Africans when it comes to culture, race, love, and sisterhood. A sense of unity befell Sade to see a globally similar racial reality (Oladigbolu).

This natural occurrence, an immigrant’s process of acculturation to a new society, must be urgently examined in the case of African world immigrants. The inclusion of their experiences of identity transformation, racism, belonging, and exclusion are relevant data to the larger discourses and praxis of Blackness, African heritage, Black Studies/Africology, and antiracism in the United States specifically, and across the African world generally. Creating open and explorative dialogue around how they understand their racial reality serves in proliferating as well as prescriptively determining methods of cultural self-preservation as well as the potential for building Pan-African unity amongst diverse Black communities in the United States. While there may be differing but interlinked historical trajectories – for instance with African immigrants colonialism and apartheid versus settler colonialism, enslavement and Jim Crow(s) in the Americas – their experiences, analysis, and representations of systemic racism and of a common though diverse African heritage create more cultural similarities than differences that must come to surface so that they can be added to the larger discourse of eradicating global systems of racism.

Theoretical Considerations

“So many different noises mixed together.

Suddenly, she realized a woman was telling a young girl who must have been her daughter:
‘Ja, das Schwartzte Mädchen.’

From the little German that she had been advised to study for the trip, she knew that ‘das Schwartzte Mädchen’ meant ‘black girl.’

She was somewhat puzzled.

Black girl? Black girl?
So she looked around her, really well this time.

And it hit her. That all that crowd of people going and coming in all sorts of directions had the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the market at home.”

– Our Sister, in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy*

Undoubtedly, an examination of African global experiences can be approached a myriad of ways. This article examines how African immigrants (especially those not situated in racially-divided spaces like South Africa) negotiate racial and ethnic identities imposed upon them once they arrive to the United States by using the Nigerian Diaspora as a case study. They face globalized and localized oppressions that lead to labor-based emigrations, which in a vicious cycle contributes to the brain drain at home, Nigeria. How they understand their oppression as still steeped in global systems of racism is made multiple and complexly detailed by their journey to geographical spaces practicing racial domination.⁵ Do members of the Nigerian Diaspora come to recognize themselves as Black, and African – versus ethnic affiliations such as Igbo, Ijaw, Yoruba – alongside African Americans and other Black immigrants? How does the process of learning everyday racism influence their ability not only to survive in the United States, but to thrive by blending their understanding of post-independence era/contemporary continental racial projects (i.e., neocolonialism) to that of the post-Civil Rights/Black Power United States (i.e. so-called postracialism) to gain a deeper understanding of both their homeland and hostland predicaments?

In the opening epigraph of this subsection of this article, the protagonist of *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* – Our Sister or Sissie – has just arrived to a 1970s Frankfurt, Germany from Accra, Ghana. She made it no further than a stroll through the airport upon arrival before her identity as Black, versus Ghanaian or her ethnic classifications, was taught to her through Othering by a German woman confirming Sissie’s Blackness to her daughter (“Ja, das Schwartze Mädchen”/“Yes, the Black Girl”). Sissie was able to isolate and translate this naming, which rose above the airport’s mixtures of sounds, and was stunned when she realized it was meant for her. This happens as a matter of deduction, where she realizes the skin of all of the people around her in contrast to her own ‘black’ skin. Further, figuring out that her skin is ‘black’ versus perhaps what she knows to be ‘brown’, and others as the color ‘pink’ versus their identity as ‘white’, further reveals Sissie’s lacking knowledge of race relations in the West. Not only is this a harrowing experience for her, but it is one that she later says she would forever regret: “when she was made to notice difference in human colouring” (Aidoo, 13). This experience starts Sissie’s travels through Europe and a slowly dawning realization of not only how racism is enacted upon her and others’ Black and African bodies, but how African immigrants around her hurry to acculturate to Europeans’ faux image of them in order to survive in Germany and England, and with no desire to return home to Africa (Aidoo).

Franz Fanon’s iconic work, *Black Skin White Masks*, does more than examine the nature of a pathogenic psychological divide between accepting one’s Blackness vis-à-vis the desires to attain an impossible social hierarchal status of Whiteness – it also reveals the process of becoming a “Black” individual as a result of leaving a predominately Black postcolonial country for a predominately White post-imperial home. The representation of Martinicans’ discovery of and reaction to the racialized exclusion, cultural isolation, and lack of French social citizenship is imbedded in Fanon’s journey from Martinique to France. There emerges a stark difference between those who were born and enculturated into this reality, versus those who as adults newly immigrate and must acculturate to such dynamics. One learns multiple languages including negotiating one’s own cultural identity alongside a pressure to adjust said identity through the “Black” lens created by White societies. The reader comes face to face with Fanon’s personal observations of dichotomizing reactions of Martinicans to said experiences and languages; “for not only must the black man be black he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon 110). For him, discovering one’s own Blackness – alongside other Blacks’ discovering of their own Blackness – emotionally and psychologically proceeded as so:

I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other...and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea ...
I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all: “Sho good eatin” (Fanon 112).

The idea of existing triply for Fanon involves the space he occupies, the forced movement towards an Other identity that is transparent, and the nausea associated with the experience. Simultaneously, one occupies space but also finds himself or herself eventually disappeared in this foreign world. Additionally, he reveals another type of triple existence, that of his responsibility to his body, his people, and those who came before him. Then again he recognizes his Blackness, his ethnicity (as Martinican), and the faux imagery that the French attribute to his existence. Fanon points to many simultaneous happenings that become him as a result of existing in France, shifting how he is able to understand himself between how he seems himself, how the White French society sees him, and how he's meant to exist as a result of these categorizations. Where a discovery of one's Blackness should be steeped in cultural and historical affiliations, it is instead also focused on the negating and historically damning experiences, events, or actions that further create internalized desire for Black individuals to move away from one's own being. The power of imposition has created not only a desire to move towards White expectations of Blackness, but for one to renounce "his blackness, his jungle" (Fanon 18).

This duplicity, or multiplicity, of being and especially of becoming Black is to Fanon a nauseating experience that W.E.B. Du Bois has famously captured in his conceptual analysis of a double consciousness where Africans in the United States – Black Americans – “ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois 2). Black identity is inextricably tied to one's cultural reality and the faux identity created within an environment of racial hierarchy. This existence is constantly at war with each other due to its contrasts with each other but also due to the powerful demands by White American society that seek to ensure Blacks' impossible ability to fit into a societally constructed ideal of what it means for them to exist. But more so, Du Bois also speaks to the strength that is implicit in this population's ability to survive such consistent physically and mentally invasive processes.

Similar to the Martinican in France, perhaps the consciousness developed goes beyond a binary into tertiary or multiple identities when considering again the African immigrant's entrance into the United States. Fanon recognized that in Martinique, the African immigrant – say Senegalese – attempts to pass as Martinican, where at the same time the Martinican attempts to move towards an impossible passing as White (or at least proving one's white mask is securely worn). Multiple modes of existing are addressed here: the negotiation of at *least* a Black cultural identity, one's own national cultural identity, alongside the strivings toward White cultural identity. Moving deeper into the complexity of the human consciousness, Wilson Moses challenges that Du Bois' double consciousness cannot account for the diversity in identity expressions of Black souls. He recognizes this dichotomy of “Black” and “White” as abstractions that involve additional components of any individuals' cultural identity. Here he recognizes Du Bois as well, within his writings, tugging also between his multiple expressions of his religious identity and philosophical undertakings (Moses).

The conception of imposed and/or accepted Blackness – alongside African immigrants’ Africanness – demands multiple modes of understanding the transformative nature of one’s expressions of self between hostland realities and homeland imaginaries.⁶ The racialization and ethnicization of one’s Nigerian or more nuanced Tiv, Hausa, or Urhobo self-representations to Black and African are of concern here, without ignoring that religious, cultural, class-based, gender-based, or sexuality-based identities complicate and compliment one’s negotiation of self.

Candis Watts Smith uses Du Bois’ double consciousness to examine how diverse Black communities identify themselves along racial, ethnic, and national lines in the United States. This diversity is captured through an expression of a pan-ethnic racial identity shared by all Blacks in the US – broken up into generalized Black nationals, Caribbean immigrants, and African (continental) immigrants. However, her study more carefully engages a pool of Black individuals and allows them to speak on their own behalf about how they identify in relation to Black, African, and/or national identities. She ultimately finds complex realities, where Black immigrants may or may not understand themselves as Nigerian American or Jamaican American or African or West Indian – while pushing away from a Black identity. Similarly, the attribution to one’s sense of an African identity is expressed by some Black nationals and negated by others. However, this was never an all-inclusive reality as some Black immigrants and 2nd generation diasporic descendants of voluntary immigrants from Africa (classified as Black Americans or African Americans) proudly expressed their identities as both Black and African, or more so Black, African, and one’s national identity. Similarly, some African Americans took on both Black and African identities (Smith).

While these self-representations are diverse, Smith recognizes the part United States’ power yielding and wielding racism plays in one’s willingness to move away from or move towards racialized or ethnicized identities. Under a complex umbrella of a “diaspora consciousness,” multiple steps are involved to build an “identity-to-politics link” where members of this pan-ethnic Black community find themselves gradually identifying with each other, or moving apart, based on the political atmosphere of the country’s society. This link begins with group membership, or the involuntary imposition of racial and ethnic identities; group identification, or the psychological attachment to a group; group consciousness, or the politicization of one’s identity; and finally political action (Smith, 47-49). The position one exists within during this process is often determined by the level of tension one feels based on the oppressive actions or reactions to sub-groups, and how that experience – often racially as well as ethnically determined – encourages one to accept, and eventually take on, the responsibilities of being Black in the United States (political action). The diaspora consciousness can be a unifying act that brings diverse populations together towards collective efforts of political action as is seen in movements such as the more widely known Black Power movement, Pan-Africanism, the Harlem Renaissance, and more recently, Black Lives Matter.

Implicit in this negotiation of one's complex consciousness – be it a new or longstanding process – is the constant transformation of cultural identity that members of the African Diaspora undergo. Stuart Hall defines cultural identity while examining representations of the Afro-Caribbean diasporas in cultural productions. As part of the African Diaspora, who one is is determined not solely by a retelling or recounting of history but also as a contemporary and continuous production of identity. So instead, he considers a second definition of cultural identity in the African Diaspora that forefronts how Africans have and continue to be able to identify themselves by expressing communities' lived experiences that are continuously made and remade.

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (Hall 236).

The African Diaspora subject's cultural identity is constantly in a transformative state of becoming. On one hand, culture may consist of one's recovered histories, but on the other, cultural identity is also determined by the living context (power, society, history) in which the culture is produced. Hall suggests that this transformational space of cultural identity is the only space where scholars can understand the conditions of diasporization – the traumatic character of the colonial experience. Cultural identities of the Diaspora, as transformational, are also located in their relationship to Africa, a physical or mythical home. It involves movement – a circularity of journeys. By this nature of African cultural identities, the Black subject cannot be contained to merely her/his Blackness (or Africanness) as a dystopic reflection of Whiteness. S/he must be considered in relation to her/his culture as it is, and as s/he defines it (i.e. her/his lived experience).

The cultural productions reviewed in the following sections provide examples of the transformations of cultural identity as a result of one's racialization and ethnicization. Like Fanon, Nigerian immigrants to the United States undergo a discovery of one's Blackness (and Africanness) in relation to other African diasporas and the domineering White American society. Each example provides evidence to the various stages of Nigerians' identity-to-politics link towards recognizing a pan-ethnic diaspora consciousness.

More so, what becomes compelling is how they begin to more deeply understand the extent to which social affairs in Nigeria are a result of global processes of marginalizing African communities, cultures, and knowledge worldwide by extracting labor and resources and imposing Western or non-African cultures, communities, and knowledge. This can lead to complex analyses of global racism as a result of being transnational subjects between two (or more) nations.

Notes on Methodology

This article uses content analysis as a method to extrapolate markers of racialized and ethnicized identities found within the cultural productions in this study: the Wowo Boyz' YouTube comedy sketch "Sensitivity Training", *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters* by filmmaker Rahman Oladigbolu, and *Americanah* by novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Theories of Post-racialism in the United States will be used to understand the formation of Nigerian Diasporic racial identities. In terms of racial identities, race is examined both from national and global contexts of racialism. W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness (as well the idea of multiple consciousness) is essential to this framing and in considering the intra-racial experiences and references the cultural producers use to explain or differentiate one's Blackness in relation to Whiteness. This is used to interrogate race in the United States, but this article also considers the racialized spaces that Western imperialism and post-colonialism pose in racially dividing and dominating Black spaces, people, and ideologies in the African world. Ethnicity is examined similar to Candis Watts Smith's definition of pan-ethnicity, or an intraraciality of Blackness. That is to say that within a Black racial category, and in light of new African diasporas to the United States, there are many nationalities and ethnic groups that exist, creating moments of intra-racial tension and cohesion (Smith).

These examples of Nigerian Diaspora identity are considered cultural representations, forged from the real and imagined space of authors who are part of the communities they write about. The cultural productions used were chosen due to their ability to represent ethnic, racial, as well as cultural and transnational complexities of Nigerian Diaspora identification. Additionally, all of the authors are or were at some point immigrants to the United States themselves, providing a nuanced experience of racial discovery, which is different than the children of voluntary contemporary immigrants – 2nd generation – who are born into the US' racial domination.

Deconstructing Racialized Stereotypes in “Sensitivity Training”

The Wowo Boyz’s YouTube Chanel is one of multiple social media platforms that this group of comedians use to post comical sketches about being African in America. As a vast, global video platform, YouTube houses the majority of their comedy sketches, promotional videos, and dance videos. However, shorter versions can be found on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Their fan base expands throughout the United States, but they also attract audiences in global spaces such as Nigeria (Wowo Boyz). The Wowo Boyz, Nigerian immigrant and Houston-based Andrew Ogale and Nnonso Ofili, often feature other local African comedians in their sketches and also produce videos for these comedians. Many of the videos attempt to reach a larger African audience but specifically use Nigerian Diaspora experiences since all of the comedians are in fact Nigerian.

The comedy sketch “Sensitivity Training” focuses on cultural differences between Africans and African Americans. An African American psychologist, Dr. Rebecca Jones, hosts a workshop for Nigerian immigrants who have negative perceptions of African Americans. She brings in Black individuals one by one and asks the Nigerian audience to share their first impressions. The Nigerian immigrants immediately assume that the individual cannot be Nigerian based on taboo indicators: dreadlocks, pregnancy (presumed out of wedlock), tattoos, and earrings on men. In each scenario, they unabashedly insult the individual based on these indicators and the psychologist reveals their misconceptions, which either points to the marital or educational success of the African Americans or to the failures of an individual who is in fact Nigerian (Wowo Boyz).

In “Sensitivity Training,” a component of the pan-ethnic tension is perhaps more evident, imbedded in the question, where do the Nigerian immigrants gather their perspectives of African Americans? Their hasty criticism and judgment of African Americans is coded in stereotypical and media-based images of this Black pan-ethnic group. In the sketch, it is clear that the initial racialized expectations of a larger US American society towards African Americans arrives prior to their actual interactions with these diasporic communities. The Wowo Boyz break these stereotypes by positioning the Nigerians to fail when judging Black individuals based on first impressions. They use examples of African Americans and Nigerian Americans that break away from overly negative or positive ideals of either community, respectively, forcing conversations around intra-racial commonalities.

The workshop’s method – present an ambiguous Black individual and allow the Nigerians to share their first impressions of where they were raised – challenges whether a Black ethnic identity or one’s lifestyle can be attributed by physical features and attire alone. The participants use tattoos, pregnancy, dreadlocks, and men wearing earrings as negative indicators, prompting offensive responses that in each case end up being incorrect snap judgments. The first African American is a male with a tattoo on his shoulder, prompting the immediate responses:

First respondent: "tattoo? on this campus? He's crazy"

Second respondent: "If my daughter brings a man like this home I will kill her. I'll kill him too. Look at him" [knocks on table]

Third respondent: "I remember that tattoo because when I saw it I was thinking to myself what kind of parent would allow their child to carry that kind of thing on their body?"

Fourth respondent: "This one? He's a vagabond. A lost soul. Akata. You know that is the mark of the beast? You're going to hell. One way ticket!" (Wowo Boyz)

Already, they have determined his tattoo means that he is crazy, a vagabond, and a hell-bound Akata – a term that negatively refers to the cultures of Western Blacks (not excluding children of continental African immigrants). In two cases, he is made an example of what not to do as a parent with criticisms to his potential upbringing and threatening daughters who would potentially date him. Dr. Jones reveals that the student is 16 years old and a near 4.0 senior in his university. His tattoo is in homage to his grandfather, Nelson Mandela. The participants are shocked into gasps and silence by this revelation.

The final African American is male, has dreadlocks, and wears earrings. The participants become more confident that he cannot be Nigerian and that his decision to wear locks and earrings must be some mark of insanity. One participant says to him, "You are the madness that has progressed to the level that tries to bite people, or what? Because the only people I know who have isi dada [dreadlocks] are crazed people. Are you one of them? Ah?" Finally, Dr. Jones reveals that he is in fact "kinda bummy" and did not complete school, then tells him to reveal where he is from – Nigeria. All the people throw their hands up, and one even goes as far as to yell, "It's a lie! You're from Ghana!" In both cases they are unable to distinguish the African Americans by their physical appearances, even when one is from their own country. The commentary in the second instant reveals how unwilling one participant was to ascertain the African American or Nigerian culture, to the point that he makes an insult to suggest the only place he could come from in West Africa is Ghana (pointing to other inter-ethnic/intracontinental divides not discussed in this article) (Wowo Boyz).

When Dr. Jones feels that the participants still don't understand the harm of their negative perceptions of African Americans, she decides to dress in West African attire and dramatically performs US American stereotypes of Nigerians and continental Africans. She starts singing the opening song for the movie *The Lion King* and then speaks in an exaggerated Nigerian accent, praying "Ey God! Jesus!" She asks them if they practice Voodoo, and when they respond she says she can't understand what they say when they "click click click ... maybe write it down in English, so I can read it and know what they're talking about." This characterization was clearly unnerving to the point that the participants got up to leave.

Dr. Jones closes by stating that workshop should inspire them to get to know each other and come together as one, suggesting they should do away with hard segregation of their cultures: "Oh you eat curry, and I eat Fufu, and you eat regular fried chicken ... It's all chicken!" She offers that their African identity, like chicken, is part of who they are (or what they eat) and should be the uniting factor, regardless of stylistic preferences and differences (Wowo Boyz).

Multiple Black Identities and Pan-Ethnic Unity in *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters*

This film, which was released in the United States as well as Nigeria and other parts of the African continent, is a story about two friends – one African American and the other Nigerian – whose friendship is forged through cross-cultural conversations that teach them about each other's African cultures and highlights the similarities between them (Oladigbolu). The title, as filmmaker Rahman Oladigbolu mentioned in a personal interview with the author, was devised to appeal to both African and African American audiences: "In America" to attract continental Africans who desire to be in (US) America, and "The Story of the Soul Sisters" to attract African Americans who understand this culturally-determined term of spiritual, and long-standing unity between women (Oladigbolu, "Personal Interview").

Sade is a Nigerian immigrant who leaves medical school for an opportunity to come to the United States. Her arrival is met with an urgency to find work within three months to gain a work permit to that she can stay and continue her education. She works for a Nigerian storeowner, who pays her less than half minimum wage under the table. She stays with her uncle, a man who has survived alone in the United States and must contend with his difficulties getting along as a Black immigrant man. A drunken and forceful sexual advance on Sade leaves their relationship broken, and this sends Sade to live with her African American friend, Sonya, and her family (Oladigbolu).

Sonya's family is extremely welcoming to Sade, and her father offers her a job with Sonya as a waitress in their restaurant, "African Soul Kitchen." A Pan-Africanist at heart and in practice, Sonya's father explains that it is his goal to create 'Africa towns' akin to China towns across the nation in order to bring diverse African food more visibly into the nation's cultural fold. Sonya is clearly a product of her Afrocentric father and critically analytical and observant mother who often becomes a motherly voice of reason for Sade as she learns to become Black in the United States. The soul sisters', Sonya and Sade, friendship grows from their willingness to learn about each other and overcome stereotypes each has had about the other's culture. Together, they are able to navigate hardships that they both encounter, such as Sonya's desire to bring her divorced parents together, Sade's relationship with her African American husband, and later her impending deportation (Oladigbolu).

Sade, as the main protagonist, learns to be Black in the United States through a series of encounters with racism as well as through critical discussions of race with African Americans. Sade's personal encounters of racism and discrimination are always tied to the discrimination she encounters being an undocumented immigrant. From the moment she arrived to the United States, she was detained and questioned about the legitimacy of her entrance. This is Sade's major point of departure for understanding racism personally. Her coming into her understanding of her Blackness is deepened and more clearly visualized by learning the racialized experiences of her African American families: Sonya and her parents, as well as her husband Curtis. When Sonya meets Sade, she quickly brings her into their family as a sister. The two spend time with Sonya's friends and frequent a Black club that features African American artists who rap, sing, or recite poetry about Black experiences in America. While they don't speak about these open mic sessions, they become a recurring theme and perhaps an important one for Sade as she learns the reality of being Black in the United States (Oladigbolu).

It is Sonya's mother who helps Sade to understand the different ways Black people in US America experience race. She tells Sade that it's not easy being a woman anywhere in the world, and especially a Black woman in US America. She says it is not easy to be a Black man either. She reveals that Curtis is working in a system that won't look beyond his skin, and her uncle (who attempted to sexually assault her) is a stranger (foreigner) in an alien world (US America). She clarifies that this is the context in which they live, but that doesn't excuse their actions. She needs to understand their world, but she also needs to know her own world better. When speaking to Sonya about Curtis, Sade finally confesses her own revelations and misgivings about the United States, in relation to her African American brothers and sisters.

Sade: I remember one of my teachers used to say that in the past they were forcing us into slavery, but today we are voluntarily selling ourselves into it. I fought hard to come to America in search of freedom, but what I did not realize was that to be free in America, fighting takes twice as hard.

Sonya: I wouldn't look at it that way. I mean people are still being forced, except now only in different ways. The buying and the selling, it still goes on.

Sade: But today we have a choice.

Sonya: What choice did you have?

Sade: Curtis is right. We leave our problems, to come and put our nose in someone else's problems.

Sonya: Sade, you didn't leave your country because you needed to come and meddle in someone else's problems. You came because you wanted to find a solution to your own. Now what Curtis said is crap. We may have come in on different ships, but we are in the same boat. (Oladigbolu)

Like many of their conversations, they also come to the conclusion of shared experiences between Africans and African Americans. Sade comes to terms with, and even reprimands herself for, unknowingly and voluntarily “selling” herself into enslavement, or the oppression that awaits Black immigrants to the United States. Sonya reminds Sade that her choice to come to the United States was not in fact one-dimensional choice, but a solution to a problem (lack of job security) that she faced at home. She ties their experiences together when she reveals that they may have come on different ships (phases of the modern African diasporic experiences),⁷ but they remain in the same boat (Black in today’s US America and perhaps globally).

The similarities between Black pan-ethnic groups is also made clear in a joke that Curtis tells Sade. In this joke, a plane has malfunctioned and is losing altitude. The pilot suggests that they rid the plane of cargo, then personal affects and heavy clothing, and finally people. In an attempt to seem fair in the determination of martyrs for this cause, he decides to begin alphabetically. He begins with ‘A’ for Africans, and while there are two Black people onboard, a man and his son, they remain frozen in their seats even as the rest of the plane looks on. When they don’t leave, the pilot continues.

Curtis: [Pilot] “Ok let's move on, letter ‘B,’ any Blacks on board?”

Sade: You've got to be kidding me.

Curtis: [Pilot] “‘C’ uh any Caribbeans on board?”

Sade: That is racism up in the air.

Curtis: So after a little while the son asks, “But Dad, aren’t we Africans?” Dad says “Shhh! No son, tonight we are Zulus!” (Oladigbolu)

This racially charged scenario, and the father’s decision to make ambiguous their Black and African identity, can be read as the inability for others to distinguish where in the African world they are from or how they identify. Regardless of where they are from, and how they identify, the father has determined a way to beat the system by temporarily identifying by a specific ethnic group (Zulu) rather than the generalized racial identities given to Black people by the United States (i.e. Black, Caribbean, African).

Learning and Uniting Black and African in *Americanah*

Americanah is, as author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once foreshadowed, a Nigerian immigrant story in America (Adichie, “Interview by Binyavanga Wainaina”). It is a journey that becomes what Rita Kiki Edozie calls “a coming of age of new African Diasporas’ experiences with race in the US and Great Britain”, which Adichie reveals in complex ways that involve negotiating one’s formed sense of identity from one’s African home (Nigeria) in relation to their new experiences with and understandings of the West’s practices of structural racism (Edozie, 67). Beginning with the title, “*Americanah*”, it evokes the idea of a Nigerian immigrant who goes to the United States and as a result voluntarily loses their Nigerian language and culture.

So “*Americanah*” ... it’s actually a Nigerian word so it’s a kind of playful word that’s used for people who have been to the U.S. and who come back to Nigeria with American affectations, or who go to the U.S. and come back and pretend they no longer understand Igbo or Yoruba or Hausa. Or who come back to Nigeria from the U.S. and, you know, suddenly won’t eat Nigerian food and everything is about ‘when I was in America.’ And also often it’s used for people who are genuinely Americanized (Fresh Air).

The novel spends time unfolding various perspectives about the Nigerian who moves to the West and how these characters choose to identify as they return home as Nigerian returnees, serious *Americanahs*, or something in between. The *Americanah*, much like Fanon’s Martinican returning to Martinique, “forgets” – or deniably suppresses – their indigenous cultural affectations to mimic or feign native affiliation with the United States or France, respectively. The African subject has undergone a transformation as a result of her/his engagement with the West and how s/he determines that s/he must exist as a result of it.

This demystification of a perfect and golden American Dream begins as soon as Ifemelu arrives in the United States. Ifemelu’s process of becoming Black is also tethered to her body as a woman. Racism is gendered due to the imposition of integrative – toward White American norms – expectations of not only how one looks, but how one defines herself. For instance, the first friend from Nigeria Ifemelu meets in the US is Ginika, a bi-racial woman. Ginika explains to Ifemelu that she had to learn that she cannot call herself ‘half-caste’ as was normal in Nigeria. She must pretend to be offended by this term and self-identity as ‘bi-racial’ (Adichie 125).

Ifemelu’s journey is one of becoming Black as well as African, different ways of imaging the same existence, as she encounters racism or learns about America’s race relations, experiences cross-cultural clashes, and encounters sexism in her friendships, relationships, and communities. From these spaces, Ifemelu is also able to gain confidence and self-love during her own transformations.

Her Blackness comes to bear as she must negotiate how she identifies with her body, hair, language/accent and complexion in light of both affirming and negating encounters with others. Her hair and accent, for instance, shift from being a non-issue for Ifemelu while growing up in Nigeria to becoming a heavy burden of her status as Black and African in the US. They must be changed in order to cope with America's expectations of Black women. However, in each case there is a significant moment when Ifemelu, after initially adopting these expectations, rejects these conformations and decides to speak in her Nigerian accent and cut her chemically-treated hair for a natural style (Adichie).

Ifemelu eventually creates a blog that reveals her observations of, and identification with, race in the United States called *Raceteenth Or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. On one hand, it can be seen as providing the general reader continental Africans' diasporic experience with racism in the United States. Then perhaps more intentionally and supportively, on the other hand, it is offered as a US American guidebook for African world immigrants on how to recognize, understand and deal with racism whilst also aligning and identifying with Blackness (Edozie). However, a firm ability to describe race for Ifemelu only comes after years of various interactions with White Americans and those who she calls American Blacks and Non-American Blacks. Ifemelu's experiences at predominately White institutions of higher education, living in White communities, observations of her cousin Dike's depression from encounters of racism at school alongside his mother's ignorant dismissal of these encounters, and her relationships with white liberals Kimberly, Laura, and Curt are significant contributors to her observation of race relations and racialized encounters amongst White Americans. Her experiences are rarely divorced from her own identity as Nigerian, or African. For instance, her growing disdain for her White American roommates is born of their denigrating demeanor towards her. In one situation, a jobless and struggling Ifemelu finds her carefully crafted sandwich subject to the hunger of her roommate's dog. Her roommate found this humorous and Ifemelu's distress for the consumption of her financially rationed food unbecoming, and when Ifemelu laments her roommate says, "You better not kill my dog with voodoo," referring to her simplistic and ignorant Eurocentric imagination of Ifemelu's African culture as taboo (Adichie 154).

However, more intimate is her relationship with Kimberly, Laura, and Curt who help her to see various manifestations of racism imbedded in White liberalism, or "new liberal imperialism" (Edozie, 79). This engagement with liberal White Americans' various methods of inferiorizing African cultures and people, intentionally or not, is in large part due to US America's fixation of retaining ignorant, simplistic, and maligned narratives of Africa. As Edozie suggests, "African immigrants, especially in colleges and universities in the US, are pervaded by this postmodern style of representing and stigmatizing their African identities as monolithically 'poor, brute, and needy' of Western benevolence and humanitarian intervention. The attitude, which is reflected in the everyday interactions of many whites' first engagement with African immigrants, spuriously dominates media and advertising campaigns..." (79).

Ifemelu is employed by Kimberly, despite her sister Laura's skepticism, as a nanny for her children. Kimberly, who Ifemelu thinks of as an *obi ocha* or clean/pure hearted individual (and as a result is never *intentionally* racist), finds herself constantly apologizing for Laura's passive-aggressive and demeaning references to Black and/or African (especially Nigerian) cultures. Laura constantly denounces African cultures or people, often by creating the scenario of an exceptional Black person who doesn't fit in with the inferiorization of the African norm. Ifemelu finds that Laura constantly researches facts on Nigeria to test on Ifemelu. In one case, she declares that Nigerians are the most educated immigrant group, with a caveat that the statistics doesn't speak to the millions that live on a dollar a day. In another, she tells Ifemelu how many remittances Nigerians send back to Nigeria, with the caveat that 419 scams are run by Nigerians. Ifemelu felt her actions an "aggressive, unaffectionate interest; strange indeed, to pay so much attention to something you do not like" (Adichie 165). She felt it was a way to denigrate Nigeria, and Ifemelu, to her optimistic sister, Kimberly.

Ifemelu's relationship with the sisters' cousin, Curt, is perhaps the most intimately precarious as articulated in her analysis of his vacillating consciousness or disregard of how racism affects her in their daily encounters. Reflecting on their relationship, and his love for her, she realized this was what bothered her more: "how he grasped one thing but was completely tone-deaf about another thing" (Adichie 291). He would, on one hand, be dismissive of her lamenting racism in his "tone-deaf" situations. On the other hand, he may find a way to unabashedly swoop in like a White savior to lift her from her plight of racism without regard to how his Whiteness was seen as authoritative rather than corrective in any discriminatory encounter. When describing her understanding of liberal spaces and relationships with liberal Whites Ifemelu argues (continuing from the article's second epigraph):

When you're black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don't talk about it. We don't even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting, or we're being too sensitive. And we don't want them to say, Look how far we've come, just forty years ago it would have been illegal for use to even be a couple blah blah blah, because you know what we're thinking when they say that? We're thinking why the fuck should it ever be illegal anyway? But we don't say that stuff. We let it pile up inside our heads and when we come to a nice liberal dinner like this, we say that race doesn't matter because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable. It's true. I speak from experience (Adichie 293).

This critique of an impenetrable vision of a post-racial United States, from her experience with White liberals as friends, lovers or foes, is a turning point in how she understands racial relations in the United States. Lamenting about discrimination based on race is quelled by the White imaginary of progress, which requires one to remain uncritical of the everyday experiences of racism, especially in a country moments away from its first Black president (just prior to Barack Hussein Obama's first presidential election). Interracial dating, simplistic non-critical discourse on the country's progress since the late 20th century, and suggesting race doesn't matter become the face of postracialism and therefore the platform in which to ignore violent racist realities in the 21st century.

These critiques, or observations, eventually become concentrated into a highly successful blog, *Raceteenth*, which provides Ifemelu a platform to reflect on her transformative experiences since arriving in the United States. During her relationship with an African American, Blaine, the blog also allows her to openly discuss her ongoing experiences with her new group of friends, primarily African Americans, people of color, and a few White Americans unafraid to critically discuss race, deepening the blog's non-American Black perspective on race. She recognizes that the way racism affects her can align with that of American Blacks but at times diverges based on identity-based or experiential-based differences between pan-ethnic Black communities. She provides an analysis of various American communities' responses to racialized situations, including WASPS or White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, non-Christian Whites, Asians, Latino/as, American Blacks, and non-American Blacks (Adichie).

Perhaps two moments reveal the novel's leanings towards publicly building Pan-African unity and pan-ethnic communities in the face of one's Black identity in the United States: the African Students Association meeting and her *Raceteenth* blog post "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby" (Adichie 222). In the first, Ifemelu is invited by Wambui, a Kenyan woman, to the African Students Association meeting during her early years in the United States. This is one of the first places that Ifemelu finally feels that she can be herself. The organization was a mix of Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, one Congolese, and one Guinean who "sat around eating, talking, fueling spirits, and their different accents formed meshes of solacing sounds," mimicking ignorant comments by Americans and mocking Africa in a way "born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again" (140). What made this experience more profound, was the 'welcome talk' that was given by a Tanzanian, Mwombeki. The welcome talk is a guidebook for Africans who are new to the United States, and at one point he states:

Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. Always attend African Students Association meetings, but if you must you can also try the Black Student Union. Please note that in general, African Americans go to the Black Student Union and Africans go to the African Students Association. Sometimes it overlaps but not a lot. The Africans who go to BSU are those with no confidence who are quick to tell you ‘I am originally from Kenya’ even though Kenya just pops out the minute they open their mouths. The African Americans who come to our meetings are those who write poems about Mother Africa and think every African is a Nubian queen (Adichie 141–2).

Mwombeki suggests to the newcomers that they should not avoid, but develop relationships with African Americans as well as continental-born Africans during their time in the United States. He breaks down the cultural difference between the groups and the overlap by Africans perhaps wanting to be “African American” and African Americans wanting to be “African”. Here there is a playful criticism of the generalization of each cross-over group, while at the same time there is insistence on advocating unity through friendship. He later suggests that relationships may come more easily with non-Black immigrants who understand the “trauma of trying to get an American visa” (Adichie 142).

As a more mature, and definitely more critical, revision of this welcome talk, Ifemelu’s blog post years later echoes a message of shared experiences amongst diverse Black people in the United States. The blog post is meant to quell the belief that a non-American Black is anything but Black in the United States, criticizing the moments when Black immigrants attempt to distance themselves from the Black experience.

Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t “black” in your country? You’re in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I made something up. And admit it – you say “I’m not black” only because you know black is at the bottom of America’s race ladder. And you want none of that. Don’t deny now. What if being black had all the privileges of being white? Would you still say “Don’t call me black, I’m from Trinidad”? I didn’t think so. So you’re black, baby (Adichie 222).

Using herself as an example, she reveals how one may not initially understand what it means to be Black, but she argues it doesn't deny one's Blackness anyway. It is also a satirical yet candid and plainspoken racial guidebook for non-American Blacks' solidarity with African Americans, providing context to terms and situations that are justifiably offensive to them. Its satire is in its ability to mock white liberals' desired representation of Blacks as weak (versus strong) and passive and agreeable in the face of racism (versus assertive). She calls out the dangers and ignorance of perceiving oneself as non-Black, while at the same time being forgiving of the process one must undergo to understand their Blackness.

The encounters of racialization/racism in the United States play a transformative role in the cultural productions from Nigerian immigrant cultural producers. Like Ifemelu's discovery of her Black identity, learning to be Black involves insight to one's cultural identity in light of an oppressive hierarchy of racialized cultural hegemony. However, at some point, especially within *Americanah*, the reader sees the self-determination of oneself as part of a larger Black community then transposed onto how the Nigerian immigrant imagines systems of racialized oppression at home in the aftermath of colonialism (Adichie). They join the Nigerian American cultural producers in their critique of the impact that the European slave trade and colonialism has on African people, cultures, and spaces. Learning to be Black is thus a recurring theme, interwoven in and followed by critiques of neocolonialism in Africa and critiques of post-racialism and liberalism in the United States. Instances of racial discrimination, especially based on body image and African ethnicity, are catalysts for this transformation, and representation of cultural differences becomes a form of resistance within most of the cultural productions.

Conclusion: Towards a Black and African Global Experience in the United States

“The Africans, however, were not always so easily placated; their blackness assumed greater salience the longer they stayed in the U.S. especially as they and their families were forced to negotiate the country's treacherous racial quagmire and their children became African Americans or American Africans, as Ali Mazrui calls them. The gravitation towards African American grievances reinforce the Africans' own long-standing grumblings against the marginality of African voices in African Studies.”

– Paul Zeleza, “Building Intellectual Bridges: From African Studies and African American Studies to African Studies in the United States”

In the epigraph above, Paul Zeleza reveals the salience of understanding how African immigrant scholars and people begin to understand their Blackness in the United States in an effort to reveal their eventual acknowledgement of what he previously called “the ties that bind” Africans to African Americans in the United States (Zeleza). He recognizes not only this shift in individual and group consciousness, but the desire to address these divides, towards unified actions, by acknowledging the lack of diverse lived experiences in Eurocentric African (and African American) studies (Zeleza, “Building Intellectual Bridges”).

Similarly, each of these cultural productions – *Americanah*, *In America: The Story of the Soul Sisters*, and “Sensitivity Training” – reveal a sample of fictional representations of realistic lived experiences of the Nigerian Diaspora to the United States. Each of these cultural producers, in interviews, have challenged that their cultural representations reflect their own dealings with inter-racial and intra-racial (pan-ethnic) relationships with people in the United States (Fresh Air; Oladigbolu, “Personal Interview”; Ogale). Through these experiences, the characters: deal with intra-racial divides created by societal racisms towards diverse Black communities; face racist encounters as a result of their categorization as Black or African (Black and foreign) varying from dismissiveness or passive aggression from White liberals, to discrimination against one’s cultural physical attributes in opposition to expected “Americanized” physical attributes, to racism specific to immigration status; and they also learn about their Blackness through positive and affirming interactions within Black social spaces, with diverse Black communities, and interpersonal relationships with other Black individuals.

The varied examples from these cultural productions also reveal the complexity of the Black and African experience in the United States, with protagonists in various stages within Candis Watts Smith’s “diaspora consciousness”, where transformative experiences towards Black and/or African identity are coupled with acknowledging one’s fate as tied to the pan-ethnic Black communities around them. The Nigerians in the *Wowo Boyz*’s “Sensitivity Training” could be categorized as coming to terms with a pan-ethnic “group identification” – Dr. Jones’ demonstration powerfully deconstructed stereotypes separating continental African cultures from African American cultures and used these shocking encounters to reveal the unity amongst African peoples in the United States. *In America*’s Sade moves towards “group consciousness” through engagement with Pan African Black Americans (like filmmaker Rahman Oladigbolu), interpersonal relationships with Sonya and Curtis specifically, as well as engaging in social events where Black culture is celebrated (Oladigbolu, “Personal Interview”). At the same time, she ties her fate as Black to her growing family due to her own experiences with, and negotiations of, racism as well as coming to terms with how others experience and negotiate racism.

Ifemelu, in *Americanah*, like all three cultural producers, goes further to act as a result of her racialization and ethnicization. Like Sade, she uses interpersonal inter-racial and intra-racial relationships that involve racism or that engage topics of racism/Pan-African unity to help her understand what it means to be Black and African in the United States. Another component that is important for Ifemelu, not mentioned earlier, is her exposure to African American history, culture, and literature, including the works of James Baldwin and Barack Hussein Obama. While Sade is able to make comparative analyses between the predicaments of diverse Black populations (Nigerian vs. African American), Ifemelu goes further to publicly engage these topics under a Pan-African banner as “Non-American Black”. Here she homogenizes herself as Black, but non-American, blurring the lines of a global Black immigrant experience with becoming Black in the United States. She uses this platform to then teach new Black immigrants, and other communities, about her observations of the race relations in the United States. As a result, she moves towards Smith’s “political action” category, where she finds herself responsible for her experientially determined knowledge, like that of her African Students Association colleagues, and by responding to the urgency of sharing these perspectives with perhaps unknowing Black immigrants who do not yet understand themselves as Black (and African and/or Caribbean).

These experiences provide evidence of some of the situations that can lead to not only African immigrants’ understanding of themselves as Black and African, but also in affirming actions accepting and engaging these identities towards more complex understandings of global systems of oppression that face them both at home (Nigeria) and in a hostland (United States). Jemima Pierre, in *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race*, places racialism into a global context by considering not only how race affects Black communities in diasporic hostlands but also Black communities in post-colonial African countries. She recognizes the process of racialization, or racecraft – or the systematic removal (or addition) or biological attributes relegated as witchcraft (or taboo) in order to socially construct race⁸ – in post-colonial Africa as coeval to the experiences of racialization in the diaspora, and she uses Ghana as a case study to extrapolate continental African perspectives on race to contribute to the global discourse of race and racialism (Pierre). Similarly, Nigerian diasporic experiences of race will be similar, albeit different, than that of members of other African diasporas in the United States.

This article has taken time to reveal some examples of how Nigerian immigrants transform from their national and cultural identities in Nigeria to incorporate those imposed on them within the United States. It is primarily Sade and Ifemelu who take their experiences in the United States to create more complex commentary of how Nigeria’s neocolonial state is made complex with these global systems of racism. Sade focuses on the shared experiences of enslavement, which she considers voluntary on her part, as a result of needing financial stability to support herself and her family back at home.

Ifemelu, engages this topic through the lens of Americanahs, similar to Franz Fanon's returning Martinican, where one feels the need to privilege a performance of American identity rather than some more naturally hybrid, or a resilient non-American African, identity as a result of forced acculturation or assimilation to the United States' images of Blackness or Africanness. While these critiques are outweighed by the initial encounters with racialism and ethnicism, it is important to note as well in future scholarship how Africans' (continental or diasporic) racial and ethnic identities and understanding of these identities are made complex through transnationalism. That is to say that as they travel to new spaces, they are able to more complexly examine and comment on the commonalities between African global experiences. This article further encourages scholarship that engages diverse Black global experiences with multiple consciousness that comes with transnational experiences of existing culturally, racially, and ethnically. International, intra-national, and cross-cultural dialogues between Black communities are critical to providing said communities with deeper understandings of how one's cultural experiences fair in contrast to narratives of racial oppression in which African people do not possess agency.

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Notes

¹ Unless used in a specific context, Black and African are used interchangeably in this article to call African global people.

² In his definition of internalized racism, relevant to the topic of Afrophobia, Itibari Zulu recognizes it as a “phenomenon which occurs when victims of racism, through coercion or conditioning, turn racist attitudes and actions against themselves or their racial/ethnic group” (Zulu, 143-4).

³ Some examples include President Trump’s Executive Orders of January 2017: “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States” or the “Muslim Ban” and “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” (Trump).

⁴ A term in Nigerian Pidgin English.

⁵ Anthony Marx provide perspectives of the racial systems maintained in the United States and South Africa. Marx suggests that the United States and South Africa’s racial structure is “racial domination”. As a result, race is determined as it relates to the success of the dominant culture. Ethnic and cultural identities are also shifted to assimilate to the politically determined identities.

⁶ Ato Quayson’s “Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary” puts forth the idea of a diaspora imaginary, consisting of the various ways African populations exist in the Diaspora. One of these notions, genealogical accounting, speaks to the responsibility of the African diasporan to account for her history and her people both in local contexts and at home. Home refers to how the Diaspora subject understands their relationship to Africa.

⁷ Colin Palmer examines the movement of African people from the genesis of humanity until today, divided into premodern and modern diasporas. The European Slave Trade and the contemporary movement of Africans account for the modern diasporas and are distinguishable from the premodern due to the persistent racial oppression and resistance that, in part, characterize them.

⁸ Stephan Palmié, for instance, uses Presidents George Washington's and Thomas Jefferson's family line, specifically those born of forced relationships with their enslaved African women, to reveal the complexity of biology that negates the social construction of race. That is, in part, up to 80% of the descendants of enslaved Africans have non-African familial lines as a result of forced sexual relationships with enslavers, and as a result many of this population are socially categorized as White.