Interracial relationships and the migrant's identity conflicts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'impasse*

Research article

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing one of the key elements that take a heavy toll on the migrant's identity consciousness and adaptation, namely interracial relationships. This research investigates the role of these cross-cultural relations in the migrant's identity negotiation. Although the African migrant intends this form of relationship to help him/her integrate in host land, it rather deepens the migrant's sense of alienation and estrangement. This paper upholds the argument that differences in the perception of racial prejudices foster the African immigrant's frustration in the West and cause him/her to envisage return to race-free relationships in native land as a solution to racial biases. The migrant therefore experiences various forms of exclusion abroad; seeks the refuge of an interracial relationship to protect him/herself from the violence of racism; and is disillusioned by this relationship to the extent of returning home to reconstruct his/her identity. This research uses the comparative method to underscore zones of (dis)similarity between Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Daniel Biyaoula's *L'impasse* as regards their depiction of interracial relationships. Psychoanalytic criticism and Frantz Fanon's ideas are employed in this paper to show how unconscious desires, complexes and stereotypes trump interracial unions. This research arrives at the conclusion that the shadow of Euro-centricism and the myth of white superiority loom on interracial relationships (sometimes unconsciously) and enact the 'impossibility' of these relationships.

Keywords: African migrant, complexes, unconscious, conflicts interracial, identity

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Public Interest Statement

The concatenation of worlds, which migration provokes, gives room for multicultural exchanges that enable the Self's acceptance of Others. However, it happens that this admired symbiosis crumbles when economic precariousness and deeply-rooted complexes hit this professed globalization. This premise has led researchers to study inter/trans-culturalism from different angles. In this study, we focus on interracial relationships as depicted in Adichie's *Americanah* and Biyaoula's *L'impasse* because they are microcosms of the larger intercultural exchange. Hence, these relationships provide us with some of the contradictions and complexities that surround interracialism today. Psychoanalysis and Franz Fanon's ideas are employed throughout this paper to analyze the psychological background and evolution of the black migrant as he/she faces economic marginalization and rabid racism. This research underscores the impossibility of serene black-white relationships when those involved have not been freed from racial polarities. Like the migrants in this novel, return sometimes seems to be the only way out.

Introduction

Migrations have always been part of human civilization. Carr (2010) says that "global mobility is etched in human behavior since humanity began" (p. 2). Migration involves movement from one place to another and implies that the subject witnesses spatial and temporal changes around him or her. This displacement suggests the existence of an original settlement that is quitted (permanently or not) for another whose structure is thought to be more accommodating, safer, and more promising economically, culturally and politically. Early migrations were provoked by such causes as famine, ethnic rivalries, brutal imperial hegemony and exploration. Later on, European colonial expansion induced new migration trends between Africa and Europe with the forceful transportation of Africans as slaves to the West and the settlement of European colonial administrators in Africa. The changes brought by these migrations continue to affect the world in manifold ways today.

The keen attention paid by scholars to migration and diaspora nowadays is spurred by the developments that have marked this field from the last quarter of the twentieth century to the present twenty-first century globalized world. In fact, poor post-independence African leadership, the reign of liberal capitalism and technological advancements have increased poverty in Africa but have amplified the West's self-position as model and dreamland. Progress in information and communication technologies, for instance, has opened hitherto secluded parts of the world to global knowledge and economy which emanate from the Occident. This has led to a mass movement of non-Europeans, especially African youths, to the West through legal and illegal ways. Arthur (2010) confirms this observation when he states that "Africans from all walks of life have set their eyes away from [their native regions], looking to destinations in the advanced economies… to fulfil economic and cultural dreams" (p. 2). As such, the massive movement of Africans to the West is the latest migration trope. Its significance is that it reveals the unjust economic disparity between Europe and non-Europe; it problematizes Western rejection of African immigrants; and produces discourses on cultural shocks and identity (de)construction.

Research Objectives

The objective of this paper is to examine an important facet of the African migrant's identity struggle: interracial romance. The black African migrant in the West sometimes entertains a romantic relationship with a white partner. It is necessary to examine these relationships because they are part of the migrant's adaptation strategy in host land. These relationships constitute the society which the migrant is obliged to create for him/herself in a strange territory. Therefore, this paper sets out to analyze the nature of interracial couples and show how they fail to reduce/solve the African migrant's identity crises in *Americanah* and *L'impasse*.

Problem Statement

A reading of Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Biyaoula's *L'impasse* indicates that the protagonists of both novels engage in a relationship with a white partner. Ifemelu in *Americanah* creates romantic ties with Curt, a white American and Joseph in *L'impasse* has Sabine, a French woman, as fiancé. These interracial relationships break up when there is still much affection between the two partners. This situation pushes us to interrogate ourselves as to whether un-hegemonic black-white relationship is feasible in a world where cultures always seem to pretend fusion. The main problem addressed by this paper is: why do these relationships fail? In order to answer this question, two research questions are used: How does exclusion create an identity vacuum in the migrant? And how do unconscious hegemonic inclinations and polarities destroy the interracial bond?

Hypothesis

This research is built on the premise that interracial relationships in Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Biyaoula's *L'impasse* fail due to divergent opinions and feelings regarding racial discrimination. The failure of these relationships indicates that the partners have race-bound attitudes and perceptions; each of them reasons from the angle of his/her race. The problem is less the outside representational forces than the response of each of the partners to these forces. The omnipresence and shadow of the race problem weakens the bond of interracial couples in the afore-mentioned novels. With time, the black African migrant feels that the white partner will never comprehend and share his/her sentiments about race. The break of these relationships is initiated by the African migrant and his/her eventual return signals the impossibility of interracial relationships when both partners fail to agree on a common perception of racial issues.

Research Designs and Methods

This paper uses the comparative method because the texts under scrutiny emanate from different cultures, dissimilar regions and are originally written in different languages, English and French. The goal of the comparative approach to literature is to establish a relationship between two texts in terms of similarity, difference, translation and influence. Mathew Arnold who coined the term 'Comparative literature' postulates that for a literature to be understood, it must always be analyzed in relation with literatures that are unlike it. In the case of this work, the two novels are different but they depict the migrant's interracial relationships with much resemblance. This cannot be considered as mere coincidence. As Brown (2011) rightly argues, comparison requires

that the researcher observe the composition of literary texts and identify what they have in common because comparable texts must "[invite] the performance of internal comparison" or must contain comparison (p. 12). Hence, the choice of texts to compare is not done randomly; it requires inherent links that the researcher has deciphered between texts. The comparative method therefore helps investigate similarities in the migrant's interracial relationship in *Americanah* and *L'impasse*. The objective is to deduce meaning from *how* both novels represent this particular aspect of the migrant's life.

Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalytic criticism and Fanon's ideas are used to investigate the nature and role of interracial relationships in the migrant's identity tussle, and show how conflict emerges from within and without the migrant's psyche. Psychoanalysis is brought into existence in the early days of the twentieth century. It is a discipline and theory which studies the human mind and that owes its introduction into the body of culture to Sigmund Freud. Through his landmark book, Freud (1900) begins a series of interpretations that underscore the centrality of repressed bodily drives and basic instincts/needs to all human actions. In his readings of literary texts, he emphasizes the psychical conflicts and sexual undertones that drive the actions of the characters and even the author's style. Fundamentally, Freud bases his approach on a structural model of the mind wherein the mind is conceived as a dynamic apparatus that contains the strivings of the immoderate self, found in the unconscious, against the regulation and coercion of consciousness. According to Freud, reality lies in this unconscious and only knowledge of the latter enables a more comprehensive understanding of human nature and human fulfillment.

Wright (2003) explains this structural model using Freud's "topographic point of view" (p. 10). This topographic/structural model is two-fold but each matches the other. In the first version of this model, Freud views the mind as divided into three parts: the Conscious, the Preconscious and the Unconscious. The conscious deals with our "perception system", that is, the way we are ordered by the external world and molded by its realities. The preconscious has to do with elements of our experience that we control and can "call into consciousness at will". The unconscious, which is the most important of the three, is the dynamic part of our mind where our repressed instincts are stored in the form of images, ideas and desires. The second version, which completes the first and is popular today, involves three agencies: the Id, that contains our "instinctual drives" and inherent body needs; the Ego, "which regulates and opposes the drives" by allaying them for purposes of self-preservation; and the Superego, which represents "parental and societal influences" that aim at transforming these drives to make them comply to moral values or social norms (Wright, 2003, p. 10-11). In this structural model, Freud concentrates on the role and power of the id on human deeds right from infancy. However, other proponents of this theory like Jacques Lacan and Carl Gustave Jung make insightful contributions to psychoanalysis, notably, by shifting focus from the id to the ego and by discussing the inherent unconscious of the literary text.

Some concepts of psychoanalysis will be used in this paper. They include repression; desire; pleasure and unpleasure. These will help expose the motives of characters as well as investigate the nature of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts that shape the black migrant's

identity in host land.

This study also uses the critical ideas of a major theorist. The centrality of the race question in the relationship between blacks and whites has been given an in-depth interpretation by one of postcolonialism's precursors, Frantz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. In this book, Fanon establishes the link between individual psychology and political order, and demonstrates that colonial ideologies affect both societal consciousness and the individual's mind (Moore-Gilbert et al, 2013, p. 12). He views racism as a Western construct, a skillful colonial invention that marginalizes blacks and causes blacks, in turn, to nurture either hatred for the white or inferiority complexes toward the latter. In his masterpiece, Fanon condemns both white and black racisms and encourages the "dis-alienation" or liberation of both races to attain "the universality inherent in the human condition" (Fanon, 1986, p. 12). According to him, since both whites and blacks have had an historical influence on each other, "any unilateral liberation is incomplete"; individuals of both races must change their psychological dispositions so as to view the other as a brother, and tear off with all their strength "the shameful livery [of racism] put together by centuries of incomprehension" (Fanon, 1986, p. 13-14). Fanon's ideas will therefore be applied in the subsequent discussion to show how racism affects the psyche and unsettles emotions in interracial couples.

I- The Psychic Context in *Americanah* and *L'impasse*

In psychoanalytic criticism, establishing a psychic context is important because it clearly indicates the nature of conflicts rocking characters in a text (Barry, 2002, p. 75). In Adichie's *Americanah* and Biyaoula's *L'impasse*, conflict is intra-personal in the protagonists. This conflict is aggravated by the fact that the protagonists belong to cultural entities that are misrepresented as pariahs in host land. Harris (2017) establishes the link between conflict and cultural marginalization when she states: "conflicts are particularly likely to emerge as individuals are engaged by, become subject to, or resist the cultural surround when that individual inhabits or is inhabited by any of the many forms of non-normative identity and personhood (race, class, sexuality, disability, culture and gender)" (p. 160). Actually, Ifemelu and Joseph are individuals concerned with their own sustainability and survival in Western societies that have them in aversion. This situation spurs conflicts in their minds and these conflicts in turn have an impact on their decisions, hence inviting our scrutiny of conflict and its effects on the migrants' selfhoods. In a bid to show how conflict and ensuing crucial interracial romances are to the migrants' identity struggle, the presentation of the psychic context in this section is limited to the period before their engagement with the white partner in host land. This enables us better understand the migrants' desire to satisfy their need for solace.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's internal conflict is caused by her inability to reconcile three conflicting pressures in her mind. Firstly, she urgently needs to secure her future in America by completing her tuition fees and getting a job that can help her pay various bills. This need for financial stability obliges her to be in a disposition to accept all sorts of job. It is worth noting that this need is intimately related to her self-esteem and pride since being in America and succeeding there would make her a heroine in Nigeria. Secondly, she wants to preserve her dignity as a woman regardless of the huddles she can encounter. Thirdly, Ifemelu's active sexual life is

repressed in America (due to her separation from Obinze, her newness in America, her immersion in a flat inhabited exclusively by women towards whom she cannot direct her sexual instincts, and the tennis coach's frustrating moves). Although interrelated, these three desires are in conflict with one another and explain Ifemelu's psychological breakdown at some point in the novel.

Unlike Ifemelu, Joseph's conflicts are not rooted in irreconcilable desires but in two rivalry fears: the fear of returning to the misery and wretchedness he fled from, and the fear of remaining in France to be the target of rabid racial segregation. His fifteen years spent in France with no desire to return to Congo, not even for a visit, are a clear sign of his distancing from memories buried in his unconscious and that may come back to consciousness if he returns – (and this 'return of the repressed' eventually occurs in his encounter with a Congolese flight attendant). Thus, before his relationship with Sabine, Joseph seems to choose the lesser of his two 'evil' fears, that is, remain in France and face France's attempts to emasculate him economically and culturally. Despite the fact that the source and nature of their intrapersonal conflicts differ, both Ifemelu and Joseph find themselves in an impasse. They witness a period of vulnerability from which the interracial romantic relation seems to pull them. At least, that is how their unconscious makes them view this relationship: as an opportunity.

Exclusion, the unconscious and the need for anchorage

Conservative views about home contribute to various forms of exclusion, especially when those who migrate are perceived as intruders who simply want to benefit from the prosperity of the host land. The West which, in our context, is the host land only welcomes economically viable people who contribute to Western economy through tourism and investments. Craith (2012) postulates that there is a double standard in relation to migration wherein rich migrants are considered beneficial to Europe while poor migrants fleeing from economic precariousness are viewed as uncivilized invaders perturbing the tranquility of civilized Europe (p. 2). In the same vein, Arthur (2010) explains that African migrants are rejected and demeaned by the West due to "entrenched global depictions and representations of Africans as helpless victims, poverty stricken, a marginalized group with less social and human capital, and citizens of a continent of missed opportunities" (p. 5). With these stereotypical ideas about Africa, the West feels superior to African immigrants who eagerly pursue material security allegedly attained by the West centuries ago. The power of money and the enduring myth of European superiority furnish a rationale for the exclusion of African immigrants in the West. Hence, the making of blackness or the creation of the black is accomplished through the dual processes of blacks' economic dependency and their internalization of this artificial inferiority (Fanon, 1986, p. 13). Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Joseph in *L'impasse*, struggle with the shock of their exclusion in America and France respectively. Their exclusion is analyzed in this section as dominantly economic and cultural.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's first job offer is cleaning an old sick white man thrice a week in a fetid apartment (Adichie, 2013, p. 108). She quickly realizes that the kinds of job reserved for Black people are demeaning, poorly-paid jobs that maintain African migrants in a subaltern position. With the growing pressure of completing her scholarship, Ifemelu goes through a very difficult phase of unemployment in America. The narrator says "she applied to be a waitress, hostess,

bartender, cashier, and then waited for job offers that never came, and for this she blamed herself. It had to be that she was not doing something right; and yet she did not know what it might be" (Adichie, 2013, p. 109). The American society deprives Ifemelu of the jobs she has migrated to seek and this builds in her feelings of impotence. She is unable to explain her failure to secure a job and this obliges her to interrogate herself about what is lacking in her adaptation. The absence of jobs at the beginning of her stay in the US creates a desire to adapt to American values that can help her integrate host land. The joblessness she runs away from in Nigeria is the first experience she has in America with the added difficulty that she is meant to feel responsible for her unemployment. Her question, "what am I doing wrong?" suggests a crisis in her identity, in the perception of her unemployed self (Adichie, 2013, p. 121).

During this period of uncertainty and financial instability, we are told that Ifemelu "was at war with the world, and woke up each day feeling bruised, imagining a horde of faceless people who were all against her. It terrified her, to be unable to visualize tomorrow" (Adichie, 2013, p. 127-28). Ifemelu's isolation and anxiety constitute the shock and disillusionment of many an African migrant who had idealized the West only to experience personally the West's marginalization of and disdain for immigrants. At this point, migrants struggle for survival by carving out a new life in the host land no matter the values of their native consciousness which they must now violate (Kenny, 2013, p. 56). The need to succeed by all means in America pushes Ifemelu to go to the tennis coach in Ardmore. He pays her a hundred dollars for practicing a form of prostitution which he euphemistically calls relaxation. After this action that literally saves her scholarship and pays her rent, Ifemelu feels dispossessed of her own self and enters a dark period of psychological trauma and depression (Adichie, 2013, p. 128-31).

Harris (2017) indicates that "the person in conflict feels in the grips of two impossible errands" (p. 161). This is exactly Ifemelu's situation: she is trapped in a conflict opposing her desire for self-realization to her desire for self-esteem. Her indigence causes her to lose her female dignity. What more, this happens at a time when she is repressing her love and lust for Obinze who had sent her one hundred dollars weeks ago (Adichie, 2013, p. 122). So Ifemelu is not sexually gratified and she is forced to commit an act of harlotry to save her financial power. Her encounter with the tennis coach enables the return of her repressed sexual desire but this is done in a way that destabilizes the virtues of success and self-worth which her consciousness wants to project. We learn from the narrator that, after her encounter with the coach, Ifemelu "walked to the train, feeling heavy and slow, her mind choked with mud, and … she began to cry" (Adichie, 2013, p. 129). The words used in this excerpt signal profound anguish caused by unsatisfied desires and wishes that have bumped on the conscious realm. Ifemelu's cry is a response to her grief. E.C. Wood and C.D. Wood (1984) argue that tears are "occasioned by the ego temporarily threatened with being inundated by complex memories and affects" and "while the ego works through earlier related conflicts, now remembered", tears enable a release from frustration and pain (p. 117). As such, Ifemelu's ego that works for self-preservation is threatened by the Ardmore experience and in this instance, all the repressed desires and conflicts in her mind emerge with force. These unresolved conflicts engender pain which now finds an outlet through her cries. Her distress and "self-loathing" are caused by the realization that America has turned her into a prostitute as a way of financing her fulfillment. She virtually loses her bearings and is only rescued

when she obtains a babysitting job at Kimberly's home (Adichie, 2013, p. 132-34).

From a cultural standpoint, Ifemelu is shocked to notice that because she comes from an African country, she is automatically treated as someone who is ignorant of and untamed by American English and accent. During her first days in the University, Cristina Tomas, a white American, displays a superiority complex toward Ifemelu by breaking English sentences into smaller units. Her argument is that she is certain Ifemelu does not yet understand American English and still needs to practice American accent. Cristina tells Ifemelu: "I bet you do [speak English] …I just don't know how well" (Adichie, 2013, p. 111). Ifemelu is made to indirectly understand that she must learn to speak like an American if she wants to integrate this society. The narrator tells us that after this event, Ifemelu actually "[begins] to practice an American accent" (Adichie, 2013, p. 111). She is made to conform to American linguistic standards for her insertion.

Also, once she is employed as babysitter at the Turner's residence, Ifemelu is reminded of the race pyramid and of the bottom position occupied by the Black race in this classification. This occurs when a white carpet cleaner assumes that Ifemelu is the house owner, wears a hostile look and devises to leave without cleaning. He is only reassured and glad when he realizes that Ifemelu is a servant like him. Revealing the white carpet cleaner's mind, the narrator says: "She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be" (Adichie, 2013, p. 140). Actually, as a poor white in America, this carpet cleaner has modest finances and does not expect an African migrant to own a home in 'his' country when he is poor. The hostility in his face disappears because the racist structure has not been disrupted by Ifemelu; she does a petty job just as he renders a petty service. It is unthinkable for the white American in his own country that a black person has better standards of living than he has. An incident like this pushes Ifemelu to seek for ways of reducing racial prejudices against her; her relationship with Curt is intended to do just that.

In Biyaoula's *L'impasse*, Joseph suffers exclusion when he is marginalized by the white racial entity. The White community in France keeps reminding Joseph of his racial difference by adopting exclusionary attitudes in social interactions that are simultaneously verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal. Upon returning to France, Joseph is othered in an incident in a shop where White children are frightened to see him and shout as though they have met with a strange monster. Joseph says, "voilà que par deux fois, des petits enfants de trois ou quatre ans posent sur moi de grands yeux et se mettent à crier, en tendant le doigt vers moi: 'Maman ! maman ! regarde, maman ! Là ! un monsieur tout noir ! un monsieur tout noir'"[7] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 169). Joseph is ostracized because he is Black. He feels humiliated in public by "innocent" children who have already internalized the racist stereotypes of their parents and of society. This incident evokes Fanon's own experience recounted in *Black Skin, White Masks* where, in a train, a young White boy tells his mother, "Look, a Negro!" and Fanon highlights that this boy's fingering at him makes "the circle [to draw] a bit tighter" near him (Fanon, 1986, p. 112). The circle symbolizes racist oppression and imprisonment. The image of a pointing finger, accompanied by amazement (textualised in

[7] "It happens twice that little children aged three or four lay big eyes on me, point a finger at me and start shouting: 'Mum! Mum! Look, mum! There! A black man! A black man'"

exclamation marks), emphasizes the Other's difference from the European Self and the Self's negation of every essence other than his own.

Joseph equally experiences the violence of difference in a bistro where two White ladies gossip and mock at him from afar. When he rebukes them, one of them tells him that she can do what she likes in France because it is her home. White men in the bistro refer to him saying, "Dis donc, négro! T'as pas à t'adresser aux gens comme ça, hein!"[8] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 190). Joseph realises that Whites have positioned him at the margins of France, as a stranger who should submit to their dictates – the orders of those who "own" France. He is constantly reminded that he does not belong to/in France through subtle gestures of repudiation like gaze. Marie, the White servant in the Rosta family rejects Joseph during his visit to this family. Talking about Marie's attitude towards him, Joseph says, "la surprise s'empara de son visage de chouette quand elle me vit. Puis elle me regarda des pieds à la tête. Ça me fit quelque chose qu'elle me détaillât de cette manière. On aurait dit qu'elle examinait une plaie suppurante"[9] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 150). If Joseph discerns this subtle, hateful gaze it is because it is specially directed towards him to signify his rejection. Far from being a trivial, capricious gesture, Marie's gaze is one of domination, a reiteration of White supremacy. In their discussion on symbolic violence, Flam and Beauzamy (2011) opine that "in the encounters between 'natives' and 'foreigners' the human gaze plays a powerful role as an instrument of control, domination and rejection" (p. 224). In France, Joseph is the foreigner and Marie is the native. Consequently, the self/other binary is reversed: he is the minority "I" (the individual) who seeks to know how the majority "Other" (the French community) perceives him. Marie views Joseph as an outcast, better still, an eccentric phenomenon whose very presence disrupts order. Her gaze reflects the desire to subjugate that which has been defined as abnormal and wild. Flam and Beauzamy (2011) indicate that in the context of migrant identity formation in Europe, "the gaze of the 'Other' simultaneously constitutes, judges and, in the very act of judgment, subordinates 'I' to the 'Other'" (p. 222). As such, the migrant's self is crushed by societal practices of rejection and his feeling of belonging gets constricted because the appreciation that "others" make of "I" affect I's identity.

Another means through which the White community excludes the African migrant is economic precariousness. The first glaring evidence of economic injustice suffered by Blacks in France is the peripheral location of their homes as a means for Whites to contain them at the outskirts of the metropolis. These Blacks live in Z.U.Ps meaning (this is a word-for-word translation) "Zones to be Urbanized in Priority". This euphemistic appellation disguises the veritable names that should be given to these quarters: ghettos and slums. Joseph describes one of these Z.U.Ps where his compatriots and himself live: "C'est l'expression parfaite de notre misère à nous autres…Tout y est sale, affreux, lugubre, gris. Les immeubles, les rues, les arbres, les chiens, les chats, les gens que je vois. Le beau y est interdit"[10] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 213). Blacks

[8] "Wait a minute, Negro! You don't have the right to speak to people that way, huh!"

[9] "Surprise seized her owlish face when she saw me. Then she glared at me from toes to the head. I felt something seeing her stare at me this way. It was as though she were examining a suppurating sore"

[10] "They are the perfect epitome of our misery… Everything there is squalid, hideous, lugubrious, and grey. The buildings, the streets, the trees, dogs, cats and the people I see. Beauty is forbidden there".

are made to live in such places to construct a cherished difference between poor Blacks and rich, modern Whites. Likewise, Ifemelu in *Americanah* rents a room in "Powelton Avenue, on the corner where drug addicts sometimes dropped crack pipes" (Adichie, 2013, p. 105-6). She too lives in a secluded, insecure area. This falls into the overall scheme of exclusion. Wodak (2011) submits that "exclusion is linked to power" and that it "means deprivation of access through means of explicit or symbolic power… implemented by the social elites: access to… jobs, housing, education and so on" (p. 54, 60). Blacks are forced to occupy these slums in the peripheries because they are jobless, and unemployment is, in their case, a purposeful plan geared towards materializing their inferiority.

Using the economic weapon to exclude Blacks in Europe is a strategy that Fanon (1986) highlights when he says that "if there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization… of this inferiority" (p. 13). The economic precariousness of Black migrants pushes many of them, like Dieudonné, to justify their condition to be the will of fate. Forcing misery on Blacks is an efficient colonial strategy because it abandons them to two philosophical abysses that necessarily fracture the migrant's identity: why are Blacks hated so vigorously? And can I, a Black person, escape oppression? The various forms of exclusion and intrapersonal conflicts that Ifemelu and Joseph experience in the West push them into interracial relationships with the primary motive of finding a shield against their exclusion. They no longer wish to be demeaned because of their skin color. At this point, the question we can ask is whether their interracial relationship achieves this goal.

I- Impossible: Love and the Shadow of Race

Fanon (1986) affirms that racism and its accompanying complexes constitute a "poison" that "must be eliminated once and for all" (p. 62). This poison renders impossible a Black-White union since the assumptions of a race contrast those of the other and create some form of incompatibility between the partners, even when love, the affective tie, is still vibrant. Fanon (1986) warns that "authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority" or superiority (p. 42). This means that interracial relationships can only succeed when both partners free themselves from the net of their racial subjectivities and interact on equal terms with the other. This is however impossible for the alert African immigrant to do because putting aside his/her blackness aside always leads to their immersion/melting into the Western fabric. On the other hand, the white partner unconsciously remains at a distance from race issues either because he/she wants to appear color-blind or because he/she is just unable to be in the other's shoe. In *Americanah* like in *L'impasse*, the interracial couple breaks because the black African migrant notices his/her white partner's aloofness to and trivialization of the race problem in a Western context where the black person is constantly reminded his/her inferiority. This situation makes a lasting union unattainable for an interracial couple except for situations, like Emenike's, where the black African partner turns completely into a mimic and worshipper of Western civilization. Subsequent paragraphs therefore discuss the impossibility of interracial relationships in these two novels.

In America, the first romantic relationship that Ifemelu involves in is with Curt, Kimberly's cousin. A descendant of a bourgeois family, Curt is of the white upper class and offers Ifemelu

much luxury in America. It is thanks to him that she gets a well-paid job, the precious American visa and a decent lodging. Nonetheless, it is of interest to note that she meets Curt when her work at Kimberly's home has given her some financial stability, so her relationship with Curt cannot be tied exclusively to materialistic interests. Rather, Ifemelu's relationship with Curt fulfills her desire for erotic attention and esteem. This can be asserted on the basis that, prior to her date with Curt, Ifemelu represses all feelings and memories of Obinze. We are told that "she [still] kept Obinze sealed in silence, gagged her own mind so that she would think of him as little as possible" (Adichie, 2013, p. 134). By refusing to read and reply to Obinze's e-mails, Ifemelu is trying to forget and ignore "unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires or traumatic past events" which she wants to seal in her subconscious (Barry, 2002, p. 70). At this stage, Ifemelu is psychologically convalescent and does not want her sexual urges for Obinze to disrupt the stability she is progressively gaining. What she needs more than anything else is someone who can cuddle her and consolidate her integration in America. This is exactly what Curt does, whence she offers no resistance to his courting. We are informed that "she began to like him because he liked her" (Adichie, 2013, p. 162). Curt therefore fills her bodily needs and quenches her desire to fill the vacuum left by her repression of Obinzean memories. The source of her unpleasure being dispelled by Curt's affective presence, Ifemelu starts feeling pleasure.

Describing her pleasurable feelings for Curt, the narrator says: "Curt did indeed hold her like an egg. With him, she felt breakable, precious. She felt proud – to be with him, and of him" (Adichie, 2013, p. 185). Curiously, this appreciation and affection from and for Curt does not vanish even when their relationship is broken by Ifemelu. So what causes this break? The answer is given to us by Ifemelu herself. In her discussion with Ginika, she explains the reason for breaking up with Curt: "There was a feeling I wanted to feel that I did not feel" (Adichie, 2013, p. 242). The narrator adds that Ifemelu "had not entirely believed herself while with him" (Adichie, 2013, p. 242). In other words, Ifemelu realizes that her relationship with Curt, although materially fruitful, has made her to forget about her African identity. This relationship has made her oblivious of the concerns that her Black African identity imposes on her in America. Her racial awareness is therefore sidelined in her relationship with Curt. As Jung (2003) affirms, there is a negative conception of interracialism as implying deracialization whereas the former does not necessarily involve the latter. Jung states that "deracialization, whether gradual or sudden, implies a straightforward process toward an absence or insignificance of race" (p. 377). This expectation is utopic and liable to breed conflict because the marginalized partner is made to negate his/her race whereas he/she rather needs to feel wholly included in a mutual "transformation of race" (Jung, 2003, p. 377). This mutual transformation entails a re-articulation of race made by both partners such that each can 'see' race the way the other sees it. This exchange would enable progressive transformation and race will become less and less of an issue, not because both partners are 'blind' to it, but because they have learned to see it from the other's lenses. Curt is clearly not able to do this.

We are told that when Ifemelu is with Curt, she feels she has "an incomplete knowledge of herself" and craves for something Curt is unable to give her (Adichie, 2013, p. 244). This unnamed thing is her African identity consciousness. She feels less and less African with Curt in a racially-stereotyped America. The narrator confides: "It was not that they avoided race, she and

Curt. They talked about it in the slippery way that admitted nothing and engaged nothing" (Adichie, 2013, p. 246). This suggests Curt's inability to connect with Ifemelu's race struggle in America. As Fanon (1986) rightly infers, the white partner is unable to endorse, and be sentient of, the black migrant's permanent distress in a Western set-up wherein black humanity is contested (p. 41). This means that since Curt has been schooled in the idea of white supremacy/charity toward Blacks, he cannot perceive and understand the plagues that Ifemelu endures daily in America: he is a white and his skin color has never been a source of societal acrimony. Hence, it is difficult, quite impossible, for him to view and live the question of race as Ifemelu does. The fact that Curt regularly uses the word "crazy" to end their conversations on race indicates that he neither understands the intricacies of the race problem nor does he know how much this issue affects Ifemelu (Adichie, 2013, p. 246). One therefore understands Ifemelu's hunger for a relationship in which the important question of race will not be disturbing.

An important instance when Ifemelu's and Curt's divergent views on race can be observed is during Ashleigh's wedding. Ashleigh is Curt's cousin and the wedding ceremony is attended only by whites of high status. Ifemelu attends the wedding with Curt and she is introduced as his girlfriend. Ifemelu quickly notices the horror in the looks of the white women at the party, it is "the look of people confronting a great tribal loss" (Adichie, 2013, p. 247). In this instance, tribal stands for race. The white women view Ifemelu as somebody who has contaminated the white racial circle, not only by her presence but also by her relationship with a man (Curt) who belongs to them. Ifemelu feels the hatred of the looks directed on her and says they "pierce her skin" (Adichie, 2013, p. 247). Curt equally notices that Ifemelu has drawn people's attention. However, he does not understand that these looks are not those of admiration but of disgust and rejection. In the face of such looks, Ifemelu is obliged to seek Curt's protection from the hatred of his folk. But as the narrator reveals, Ifemelu "was tired even of Curt's protection, tired of needing protection" (Adichie, 2013, p. 247). In their relationship, although Curt does not have supremacist ideas and tendencies, the need for his protective presence only increases Ifemelu's sense of vulnerability and dependence. These still give the impression that she has to look up to him as a guide and protector. Commenting on Ifemelu and Curt's contrastive feelings and reactions to racism, Najmh (2014) adroitly submits that:

> Ifemelu notices daily, casual racism while Curt does not. Curt only notices blatant racism, such as when a spa attendant refuses to wax Ifemelu's eyebrows. At moments such as that one, he rallies to her defence, oblivious that his white, male, always-effective, always-authoritative defence only underscores and re-inscribes the racist structure in which they live" (p. 275).

Thus, Curt's inability to be sensitive to Ifemelu's identity struggle and the constant need for his protective presence perpetuate a subtle self/other binary in their relationship. It is from this binary that Ifemelu seeks freedom and eventually engages in a relationship with Blaine, a Black American scholar. Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine concurs with the solution she envisages to the race problem in America. In her blog, Ifemelu writes:

> The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you *breathe through the nostrils of your beloved*. And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved. (Adichie, 2013, p. 250, emphasis ours)

Ifemelu's romantic relationship with Curt fails because the latter cannot breathe through her nostrils or look at the American society the way Blacks see it. Conversely, Blaine, being a Black American views the race problem almost from the same angle as Ifemelu. This explains the durability of their relationship whose end is caused by Ifemelu's need to return home, not by a feeling of loss as it were with Curt. As Ifemelu says, for an interracial relationship to succeed, there must be that homogenous vision and this can only happen when lovers transcend societal ideological setups and share one main interpretation of the race problem. In Ifemelu's case, the best alternative is to return to her home where the question of race does not exist, whence her return to Nigeria and reconciliation with Obinze. We therefore agree with Najmh (2014) when he contends that "*Americanah* proposes a strong consideration of return as the only recourse when the inevitable, sustained, and intractable strangle of anti-black racism becomes unbearable" (p. 275).

In *L'impasse*, the depiction of interracial couples is similar to the one in *Americanah*. Joseph experiences all sorts of humiliation because he is Black and his relationship with Sabine is meant to find a refuge from his exclusion. In the last three years of his fifteen-year stay in France, Joseph engages in a romantic relationship with Sabine and upon returning to Congo for a three-week stay, he expresses his gratitude for Sabine's help. He thinks she has helped him solve his identity crises. Joseph says: "pour moi, et il n'y a aucun doute là-dessus, elle m'a aidé à museler, à transcender nombre de mes réticences"[11] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 19). Thus, Joseph sees in his relationship with Sabine an anchor that has helped him close his identity sores. His desire to be accepted by the white community locks him in an inferiority complex that is materialized in his relationship with Sabine. As Fanon rightly pointed out, the black man in such circumstances has the psychological disposition of clinging to the white partner with the hope that this will enable his integration and fulfillment abroad. At this stage, Joseph seems to say: "By loving me [Sabine] proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man… I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness… and make them mine" (Fanon, 1986, p. 63). Nevertheless, Joseph is somehow brought back to reality when he returns to France after his sojourn in Congo. He starts having fresh insights on his racial condition and interrogates Sabine's influence on him, realizing that it is not as beneficial or as protective as he had thought.

The societal exclusion of Blacks in France has a tremendous impact on the relationship Joseph entertains with his French lover. Both Joseph and Sabine are blocked in the consciousness

[11] "I'm convinced about one thing: she helped me stifle and transcend most of my fears"

which their different races foist on them. Faced with the same event, they have conflicting reactions because Joseph is Black and Sabine is White. For instance, when they watch a film projecting interactions between Blacks and Whites in France, they are confronted with a scene where a Black woman is raped by White men (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 194). While Joseph insists that this scene exposes the hatred of Whites toward Blacks and the latter's repudiation from French society, Sabine evokes a more general violence inflicted by male chauvinists on women of all races. This divergence of views maddens Joseph because he is shocked to realize that his lover does not feel the plights of Blacks, that she is estranged to them and always uses the veil of the universality of human experiences to justify violence meted on Blacks. Like Fanon (1986) cleverly puts it, "the white [woman] is sealed in [her] whiteness. The black man in his blackness" (p. 11). Joseph and Sabine are sealed, so to speak, in their respective subjectivities: Joseph analyses every event under the prism of Black consciousness – one that is molded by racial discriminations, cultural holocausts and economic injustices suffered by Blacks; Sabine, who is of the powerful White majority, undermines the "Black problem" and encourages Joseph to be universal in his views, to obliterate the specific predicaments of Blacks in France. Several times, she encourages Joseph to be a universal person, to be reasonable and to stop analyzing things with the lenses of his Black race. Sabine's request that Joseph adopt a Universalist perspective veils a colonial ideology consisting in bringing non-Europe under the European worldview – (Sabine is ignorant of this implication).

In fact, Sabine wants Joseph to disown experiences related to his race and melt his Self in the illusion that he is simply a Man. She wants Joseph to be stoic, to close his mind to white racist actions and feign indifference. Conversely, Sabine fails to notice that in European conceptions of Man, it is the *White man* who comes first. In other words, Universalism is tilted toward Europe as it gives the 'West' primacy over the 'Rest' and this is because European power is at stake should Europe initiate a conception of Universalism that places people of all cultures at the same level. In postcolonial discourse, Universalism is innately hegemonic a concept. Ashcroft et al (2013) posit that:

> Universalism offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity. For this reason, it is a crucial feature of imperial hegemony, because its assumption (or assertion) of a common humanity – its failure to acknowledge or value cultural difference – underlies the promulgation of imperial discourse for the 'advancement' or 'improvement' of the colonized. (p. 268)

In sum, Universalism is a European scheme aimed at silencing non-European experiences and encouraging non-Europe to strive to attain Europe's "global" stature. The dominant culture, while claiming a "common humanity", fails to sympathize with the troubles of the "Other". This is what transpires from Sabine's reactions to Joseph's exclusion. Joseph reminds her of her coldness and inability to understand him. He asks her, "tu sais ce que c'est être un Noir, un étranger ici, toi? Tu sais ce que c'est qu'avoir le sentiment d'être exclu, enterré en permanence ?

qu'entendre autour de soi des paroles acides ?"[12] (Biyaoula, 1996, p. 232). Evidently, Joseph notices that his Blackness has caused a rupture in his relationship with Sabine. He starts viewing her as an epitome of White domination and this smothers his love for her. Joseph confesses: "je ne doute plus que l'ombre de la race que je porte en moi, elle est aussi entre nous à présent"[13] (Biyoaula, 1996, p. 196). Joseph's difference separates him even from the intimate relationship he has shared with Sabine for three years.

Therefore, the depiction of interracial relationships in *Americanah* and *L'impasse* demonstrates that these unions are impossible because the partners are driven by the way society treats each of their races and this results in opposing perceptions of the race problem. Interracial relationships do not resist the pressure that societal constructs impose on them. Despite the love that exists between the partners, the shadow of race ends up creating an identity vacuum, a sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness in the black African migrant which induces the latter to return to race-free relationships in their native lands.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that the union of people from different races is rendered "impossible" by the societal norms that categorize each race and that often prevent the white partner from understanding the crises of his/her black partner. This paper has considered the process that leads the black migrant into an interracial relationship: once in host land, the black immigrant is excluded by the racist white community and needs an anchorage to stand firm in the midst of misrepresentations and humiliations. This anchorage, the migrant seems to find in an interracial relationship since it gives a measure of presence and self-esteem to the migrant. In the long run, though, the African migrant realizes that this relationship is deepening his/her frustration and is increasing his/her disconnection from identity. The African migrant finally returns home to build relationships in a race-free setting.

This paper has led to three findings. The first is that in a globalized world where Western economic power tends to subdue non-Western cultures, the African migrant's freedom is achieved only when he/she succeeds to break free from the hypnotizing effect that interracial relationships have on his/her Self-definition.

The second is that there are similarities and differences in the way interracial relationships are represented by Adichie and Biyaoula. While the conflict in *Americanah* is based on irreconcilable desires, the conflict in *L'impasse* is fuelled by two major fears. This difference only reinforces what is common to both texts: psychological unrest. This research reveals that there is always an important psychological facet to the identity struggle of African migrants. Their identity conflicts involve unconscious desires, fears, complexes and stereotypes which motivate their actions and interactions in host land.

Also, thirdly, this research has enabled us realize that there is a continuous struggle that whites and blacks must wage against superiority and inferiority complexes. The study of these

[12] "Do you know what it means to be a Black, to be a stranger here, do you? Do you know what it means to feel excluded, buried continually? Always hearing acidic words?"

[13] "I no longer doubt that the shadow of the race I carry within me is now between us"

two migration novels has actually proven that interracial relationships are metonymic of the uneven intercourse ongoing between Western civilization and Black African identities. This unequal relationship can be resolved if both civilizations are dis-alienated or freed. This freedom will however need thorough conceptualization and mutual efforts for it to succeed.

Therefore, with the use of experiences from both female and male African migrants, this research has examined the psychological, colonial and sociological involvements that overlap in the migrant's identity course in host land. Arthur (2010) says: "[immigrant social networks] become critical in shaping the form, density, settlement, adaptation, and integration of the immigrants in the new social spaces that migrants construct and negotiate" (p. 79). Thus, interracial relationships are part of the migrant's social network whose role is to help the migrant survive in a hostile milieu. As the study of *Americanah* and *L'impasse* has demonstrated, this particular facet of the migrant's social network fails to help him/her integrate host land. Moreover, the migrants' negotiations end in a kind of resignation – or consciousness, depending on our standpoint – subsumed in the notion that their identity will be safer if they return to their native lands and build a glocalized identity socle there.

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