UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
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THE IMPACT OF EUROCENTRIC BEAUTY STANDARDS IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH.*

MA thesis

EZINNE CHIDI OBIAGAZIE-IBEZIM
SUPERVISOR: DR. ERET TALVISTE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on the characters in *Americanah*, a 2013 novel by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In this novel, hair serves as a vehicle to explore more complex societal issues in both the United States and Nigeria, highlighting the ways in which racism permeates even seemingly insignificant aspects of American culture, such as beauty standards. The novel is analysed through the lens of postcolonial theory, specifically focusing on Frantz Fanon's ideas. This thesis argues that Eurocentric beauty standards imposed on Black people constitutes oppression and results in far-reaching physical and psychological health consequences of internalised hatred. Additionally, the study explores how the characters in *Americanah* resist these oppressive beauty ideals by utilising the idea of self-care in Black feminist theory, as proposed by Audre Lorde. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black people and expand our understanding of the ways in which literature can shed light on this issue.

The thesis consists of an introduction, two core chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a brief overview of the novel, the concept of Eurocentric beauty standards, as well as African American and Nigerian beauty practices and the factors that have shaped them.

The theoretical chapter focuses on Frantz Fanon's thoughts on internalised racism, dual consciousness, and decolonization, along with Audre Lorde's concepts of the mythical norm, institutionalised difference, and self-care. These theories provide a framework for the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 analyses Adichie's novel within the theoretical framework, examining the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on the black characters, particularly the protagonist. It explores how these characters, living in a society enforcing conformity to a mythical norm, internalise the embedded racism and oppression, resulting in self-hatred and feelings of inferiority. The chapter also investigates the protagonist's resistance against these oppressive beauty standards, aligning them with Audre Lorde's concept of self-care.

The findings of the study are presented in the conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian author and feminist who is widely recognized for her literary works that explore themes such as gender, race, culture, and identity. Adichie has gained international acclaim for her novels, short stories, and non-fiction essays, and is considered one of the leading contemporary African writers. Her novel *Americanah* (2013) was prompted by her personal experiences and observations as a Nigerian woman living in the United States. In interviews, Adichie has mentioned that her own life as an immigrant in the United States, as well as her observations of race, culture, and identity in both Nigeria and the United States, inspired her to write *Americanah.*

Americanah explores race dynamics and highlights the struggle of Nigerian and other African immigrants to fit into American society by altering aspects of their personality and identities. It is a story of growth and self-acceptance, and the reader follows Ifemelu, the protagonist throughout the novel as she journeys towards embracing her authentic self. Hair serves as a vehicle to explore more complex societal issues in both America and Nigeria. According to Ifemelu, the protagonist herself, “hair is the perfect metaphor for race in America” (Adichie 2013: 367), highlighting the ways in which racism permeates even seemingly insignificant aspects of American culture, such as beauty standards.

Americanah follows the story of Ifemelu and Obinze, who fall in love as teenagers in a Lagos secondary school during a period of military dictatorship in Nigeria when many are seeking to flee the country. Due to incessant strikes in their university caused by a dysfunctional education system in the country, Ifemelu and Obinze part ways hoping to reunite in the US, but Obinze is denied a visa. Obinze moves to London and ends up as an undocumented immigrant after his visa expires, while Ifemelu leaves for America to study and moves in with her Aunt Uju. University strikes in Nigeria can be traced back to the

legacy of colonialism. The British colonial government established an education system that emphasised European languages and cultures as well as the promotion of Christianity, rather than meeting the needs of the local population. After independence, Nigeria inherited an underfunded education system that was poorly equipped to meet the needs of a growing population. Over time, this has led to a dysfunctional education system and university strikes over issues like funding, salaries, and working conditions (Ibuot et al, 2018).

The novel explores the complexities of identity and chronicles the personal growth of Ifemelu, the protagonist, as she adapts her identity to fit into American society. Ifemelu faces an identity crisis as an African and an outsider in the United States. She struggles to deal with racism and being identified as “a Black person”, something she has never experienced before as someone from a predominantly black country. Ifemelu did not attribute much significance to her racial identity or categorise herself as “Black” since in Nigeria, ethnicities are used for identification, not race. The capital letter “B” in “Black” represents a specific racial and cultural identity for individuals of African diaspora, commonly used in the United States and other countries. In contrast, the lowercase “b” in “black” is a general reference to individuals with black skin colour. It is important to note that while all Black people have African ancestry, not all Africans identify as Black due to the diverse ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds within the African continent. Additionally, many Black individuals in various countries have mixed ancestry, encompassing African, European, Native American, or other ethnic origins. The capitalization of “Black” acknowledges the shared experiences, histories, and cultures of those who identify as Black, recognizing the systemic discrimination and oppression they have endured. This distinction in capitalization is a relatively recent linguistic change that continues to evolve (Eligon, 2020). In this thesis, “Black” highlights the collective racial

identity and emphasises the importance of this collective experience of the Black characters in *Americanah,* while “black” refers to individuals with black skin colour.

When she first arrives in the US, Ifemelu copes by adopting an American accent and straightening her hair while struggling to get a job in a bid to conform and take on an American identity. Taking down her braids and straightening her hair just like her Aunt Uju, a medical doctor, does before a job interview is something Ifemelu is compelled to do when she realises that natural black hair is considered unprofessional by employers in the US and straight hair is an unspoken criteria for employment as a black woman. This is a painful experience for her, as the relaxer (a hair straightening chemical) leaves her with burns and blisters on her scalp. However, she gradually gains confidence in herself and accepts her Nigerian identity while comfortably adapting to American culture and achieving success. She discards her American accent and grows her hair naturally. Initially, Ifemelu dislikes her natural hair and considers it unappealing until she discovers a website for black women who embrace their natural hair, leading her to fall in love with herself and her hair. Her self-confidence contributes to her personal growth in America, as illustrated by her blog, where she discusses significant topics such as hair, race, and the experience of being a non-American black person in America. Although Ifemelu finally finds a sense of belonging in America, she decides to return to Nigeria in the novel’s final section. By this time, however, the blend of cultural identities in her has resulted in an intermediate position where she is neither wholly American nor Nigerian. She is referred to as an "Americanah" by people at home, a term for Nigerians who return from the United States of America with American affections.

To fully grasp the significance of Eurocentric beauty standards in *Americanah*, it is essential to delve into the historical context surrounding these standards and their effects on Black individuals. By exploring the historical trajectory of beauty practices, this section

aims to uncover the societal factors that have moulded and perpetuated these standards, thus revealing the obstacles faced by Black individuals as they navigate beauty ideals that frequently marginalise and exclude them. By delving into the historical dimension, we can gain a more profound comprehension of the underlying dynamics and enhance our exploration of the novel's central theme.

Eurocentric Beauty Standards – What Are They?

Eurocentric beauty standards refer to the beauty ideals that prioritise European features and characteristics, such as fair skin, straight hair, and narrow facial features, over other features. These norms have been promoted in African American communities since the slave trade era, which lasted from the 16th to the 19th century, and in African communities since the colonial era of the 19th to the 20th century (Kinuthia et al. 2023). The preference for petite, lighter-skinned, straight-haired, Eurocentric-featured African-American women in popular culture perpetuates these ideals. This preference is sometimes seen in the underrepresentation of dark-skinned women in the media and the overrepresentation of light-skinned women in beauty commercials and fashion magazines. The glorification of these beauty standards challenges a black woman’s understanding of her physical self, and some black women experience feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem as they try to reject the internalisation of these beauty ideals while embracing themselves and other black women as beautiful (Awda et al., 2014). History and current data indicate that people with darker skin have regularly engaged in skin lightening methods in order to improve their appearance to fit Eurocentric beauty ideals (Perretta 2017). Furthermore, research suggests that exposure to pictures of slim, white models can lead to greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours in women of colour. (Coard et al 2006).

Adichie's *Americanah* is important because it examines the negative influence of Eurocentric beauty ideals on black women. By bringing these concerns to light, *Americanah* advocates for diverse and inclusive images of beauty in media and culture and encourages readers to question harmful beauty standards that prioritise whiteness and Eurocentric features. *Americanah* is set in Nigeria and the United States. Therefore, in discussing the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in the novel, it is necessary to consider the beauty practises in both countries and the various historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have contributed to their formation. While there are similarities between the beauty practices of black women in both countries, it is important to acknowledge that their distinct experiences have also shaped practices and trends that vary significantly. Despite this, it is clear that Eurocentric beauty standards have played a significant role in shaping beauty culture in both countries. In the US, black beauty practices have been greatly influenced by the historical legacy of slavery and segregation, racism, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, media representation, the beauty industry, and globalisation (Majali et al., 2017). Conversely, beauty practises in Nigeria have been and continue to be shaped by the legacy of colonisation and the country's diverse cultural heritage. Additionally, globalisation has impacted beauty practices in Nigeria, with Western beauty ideals being widely disseminated through media and advertising.

African American Beauty Practises and Factors That Have Shaped Them

The beauty practices of black women in the United States vary depending on their individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and personal styles. Natural hair care, hair straightening, weaves, wigs, cosmetics, and skincare are all common beauty practices among black women in the United States. For instance, some prefer to embrace their natural hair texture, curl pattern, and length and opt for natural hair care techniques like

co-washing, deep conditioning, and protective styling. Meanwhile, others prefer to straighten their hair using hot combs, flat irons, or chemical relaxers to achieve a sleeker look (Chatelain & Smith 2018). Some women may also use weaves, wigs, or extensions to add length or try out different hairstyles. Additionally, like women of all races, black women in the United States use cosmetics to enhance their features, such as foundation, concealer, eyeshadow, lipstick, and other beauty products. They also practise skin care routines that focus on maintaining healthy and radiant skin, which involves cleansing, exfoliating, moisturising, using sunscreen, and addressing specific skin concerns like hyperpigmentation or acne. Some historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the evolution of black beauty culture in the US include, but are not limited to, the historical legacy of slavery and segregation, the civil rights and black feminist movements, and media representation.

The transatlantic slave trade that took place from the 16th to the 19th century had a profound impact on both Eurocentric beauty standards and on black people, according to Bencosme (2017). Africans were forcibly taken from their homes and transported to the Americas, resulting in physical and psychological suffering and consequences such as the loss of cultural identity and ancestral connections. In addition to the pain of captivity, the slave trade had far-reaching effects on black people's perceptions of beauty (Schushi & Zote 2020) by establishing racial hierarchies that valued physical traits that resembled European features as more attractive and associated with higher social status and power (Patton, 2006). Thus, those with darker skin, curly hair, and larger lips were frequently degraded and devalued.

The subjugation of black hair to Eurocentric standards during slavery had a lasting impact on how Black people perceived their own hair and identity (Bellinger, 2007). Among people of African descent, hair holds significant cultural value, representing their

social status, identity, and ancestry (Bellinger, 2007). However, during the days of slavery, Black hair was subjugated to Eurocentric aesthetic standards in the United States. Enslaved Africans were frequently forcefully shaved and forced to wear head coverings in an attempt to strip them of their cultural identity and assimilate them into Western culture (Byrd & Tharps 2014; Shuschi & Zote 2020). Slaves' hair was referred to as "wool" due to a widely believed scientific notion that they and their slave masters must be descended from two distinct species. While the female house slaves were frequently given grooming time and encouraged to iron their hair straight like their white counterparts, field slaves, on the other hand, had little time to care for their hair and were sometimes obliged to keep it wrapped in a scarf to conceal the irritating "wool" (Byrd & Tharps 2001; Bellinger 2007). Over time, however, as sexual relations between the slave masters and their female slaves produced mixed-race mulatto" children with "good hair," which was straighter and softer, the pressure on the slaves to look as close to their white counterparts as possible, increased. However, even those with "good" hair were judged if their hair was not straight and soft enough, and hair was viewed as the true test of blackness (Bellinger 2007). In other words, the kinkier the hair, the more black one was considered.

The legacy of the subjugation of black hair during slavery persisted well into the era of segregation. Segregation, which lasted from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, had a profound impact on black beauty practices in the United States as it enforced Eurocentric beauty standards that excluded and limited the participation of black women in mainstream beauty practices. Nonetheless, this period also led to the emergence of strong and distinctive black beauty practices that celebrated black culture and identity. Black women persevered and created their own beauty practices based on their cultural heritage, including homemade beauty remedies and unique hairstyles that celebrated their natural hair (Craig 2017).

The impact of segregation on black beauty practices eventually gave way to a transformative period in black beauty history during the Civil Rights and Black Feminist movements. During this period, black beauty practices in the United States were further impacted. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s aimed at gaining equal rights and opportunities for African Americans, challenging conventional beauty standards and encouraging black women to embrace their natural hair and skin colour. This was a significant shift from previous beauty standards that required black women to straighten their hair and bleach their complexion (Bhandari 2020). Also, the Black Feminist Movement which emerged in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminism, that often overlooked the unique experiences and struggles of black women, played a similar role as the Civil Rights Movement with regards to beauty standards. Notable black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Kimberly Crenshaw, and bell hooks fought to create a place for black women within the feminist movement and to emphasise the unique intersections of race, gender, and class that affected black women's lives. The Movement emphasised the necessity of self-love, self-care, and self-determination for black women, as well as the concept of creating their own beauty standards. As a result of this, black beauty practices evolved to become more empowering, diverse, and reflective of the rich cultural heritage of black women. The efforts of these feminists and others in the movement have had a long-lasting influence on black beauty practices and continue to inspire and shape them today.

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, media representation and the beauty industry had historically perpetuated narrow and unrealistic beauty standards that excluded and marginalised black women. For most of the 20th century, the media often portrayed black women in a negative light, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and beauty standards. For instance, the mammy stereotype portrayed black women as overweight, nurturing

caretakers, often depicted as subservient and devoted to serving white families. This stereotype was prevalent in films, television shows, and advertisements, reinforcing the idea that black women existed solely to serve white households (Givens 2005). Black women were excluded from cultural institutions such as beauty pageants, which defined beauty standards on a national scale (Craig 2017). Yet, black women treasured their beauty within their communities and employed cosmetics, hair products, and style to meet their community's standards of femininity. The "Black is Beautiful" movement which was part of a large Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s played a huge role in transforming attitudes towards beauty standards within black communities, resulting in the emergence of cosmetics firms and products specifically for black women (Walker 2007). The phrase "Black is beautiful" came to represent the rejection of Eurocentric, white standards in favour of more Afrocentric and black norms. An important part of this transformation was the renewed celebration of black skin and tightly curled hair, which had historically been regarded as the antithesis of white beauty ideals (Baird 2021).

As a result of all these movements, black beauty practices in the United States evolved to reflect a more varied and inclusive spectrum of styles and aesthetics. African American women began to adopt previously "unprofessional" or "unsophisticated" hairstyles such as Afros, braids, and twists, and develop their own beauty products and brands to cater to the unique needs of black hair and skin.

From the 2000s and 2010s, there was a revival of interest in Afrocentric beauty practices that celebrated Black culture, history, and heritage, specifically regarding hair and skin. A significant aspect of this resurgence was greater appreciation and acceptance of natural hair textures among black people. Natural hair, which refers to hair that has not been artificially straightened or changed, became a symbol of self-love, and celebration of Black heritage (Kamryn 2022). Additionally, in a way that was different from earlier

movements, there was a renewed interest in ancestral and traditional African beauty practices, including the use of natural and organic products, and traditional skincare treatments like shea butter, black soap, and African masks. These techniques, which had been passed down through generations in African communities and were rediscovered and embraced by many as they recognized their cultural significance and effectiveness in maintaining healthy skin while honouring Black cultural history. Many Black people turned to skincare products created by fellow Blacks that addressed common skin issues, such as hyperpigmentation, uneven skin tone, and dryness, which are prevalent among people of African origin, thus resulting in the availability of more skincare products formulated specifically for Black skin.

This revival was driven by social media and online communities that allowed Black Americans to create and share their own beauty practices and narratives, challenging the limited depiction of Black beauty in mainstream media. Black beauty influencers became popular voices that promoted unique Black beauty and created spaces for Black people to learn, share, and celebrate their natural hair, skin care, and makeup practices. The natural hair movement which had been ongoing for several decades with different phases and milestones gained significant momentum during this period, as Black social media influencers provided spaces for black women to share their natural hair journeys, connect with others, and amplify the movement's message (Jeffries & Jeffries 2014). The movement challenged black women to forgo the use of chemical relaxers and other harsh hair straightening methods in favour of embracing and celebrating their natural hair texture thus becoming a form of activism that challenged Eurocentric beauty standards and sparked conversations about representation and inclusivity in mainstream media, workplaces, and schools (Scott-Ward et al 2022).

Although the natural hair movement has gained traction, it is essential to recognize that black women still encounter discrimination and negative perceptions in professional settings because of their natural hair. Additionally, maintaining natural hair can be costly, time-consuming, and requires significant care. For black women with tightly coiled hair, this can be even more challenging as research has shown that many black women avoid doing physical exercise for fear of "messing up" their hair (Gaston et al 2020). This means that these women stand a risk of developing health related conditions in a bid to maintain expensive and time-consuming hairstyles that conform to Eurocentric beauty standards. However, YouTube natural hair vloggers have created a digital community known as "curlfriends" and have popularised a do-it-yourself hair care approach for black women. These vloggers share their personal experiences, showcase product selection, and provide tips on hair care, healthy living, and stress management (Neil & Mbilishaka, 2019), thus offering credible health information and challenging Eurocentric beauty norms. As a result, these vloggers continue to shape and influence black beauty practices through their online platforms. Adichie's Americanah portrays a similar community called HappilyKinkyNappy.com," where natural hair enthusiasts convene, and Ifemelu finds strength that leads her to self-love and acceptance. Before joining the community, Ifemelu despised her natural hair, considering it unkempt and unappealing. Furthermore, Ifemelu's blog, where she writes about various topics related to black people, including black hair care, exemplifies the practices of online communities such as "curlfriends."

Moving beyond the challenges faced by black women who choose to maintain natural hair, it is worth noting that many still prefer to use hair straighteners, wigs, weaves, and extensions. Some critics view these practices as evidence of self-hatred and internalised racism (Amemate 2020). However, others argue that black women should have the freedom to choose how they style their hair, whether it be for convenience,

artistic expression, or personal preference. This allows for experimentation and control over one's appearance, similar to how people of any race may change their hairstyle (Griffiths 2022). Moreover, the hair care industry, including wig and extension markets, provides economic opportunities for black entrepreneurs and stylists (Pressley 2018).

When discussing modern black beauty practices in the US, it is essential to address the increased appropriation of Black beauty practices which has become a contentious issue in the US in recent years. Cultural Appropriation is the adoption of aspects from another culture without recognizing or honouring their cultural roots or importance (Siems 2019). In the context of black beauty, cultural appropriation refers to the adoption and commercialization of hairstyles, makeup techniques, and fashion styles that originated in black communities without proper recognition or compensation (Blanda 2020). African American beauty practices have a rich cultural history that spans generations and continents, with deep roots in African and African diaspora cultures. They have been developed and maintained by black communities as a way to celebrate and affirm black beauty, cultural identity, and resilience in the face of discrimination and oppression. For many African Americans, these practices are more than just rituals; they are expressions of self-love, and pride in their cultural heritage. However, alongside this positive movement, there has also been a trend of appropriation, where non-black individuals and entities adopt and commodify black beauty practices without acknowledging or respecting their cultural significance.

This appropriation of black beauty practices has led to a growing concern of cultural exploitation and erasure as these styles are frequently devalued or ridiculed when worn by black people, but become trendy or fashionable when adopted by non-black people (Alleyne 2020). Examples of appropriation of black beauty practices in the fashion industry include, but are not limited to, non-Black celebrities wearing box braids, fashion

designers showcasing white models wearing cornrows or Bantu knots, and the use of other traditionally black hairstyles in fashion shows or photo shoots without hiring black models are. Those that appropriate these styles have neither an awareness of their cultural importance nor respect for their creators. Meanwhile, Black people, particularly women, face penalties or discrimination for the same styles that are deemed "high fashion" when worn by others. A good example is the case of Chastity Jones who lost a job offer for refusing to get rid of her dreadlocks (White 2018). There have also been other cases where black students have been sent home because their hair was braided or worn as an afro and therefore didn't fit into the school's "hair policy" (O'kane 2018).

The practice of hair braiding and the cornrows hairstyle has a long and meaningful history in the United States, originating from African and African-American cultural traditions. The intricate braiding techniques were brought to America by African slaves as a way of maintaining their hair and cultural identity. The distinct braiding styles of different African tribes held great cultural significance, representing one's heritage, social status, and future aspirations (Byrd & Tharps 2001). The significance of these hairstyles can be lost when non-Black individuals wear them without understanding their cultural roots, leading to a misrepresentation of Black women who choose to wear them. For example, Kim Kardashian West has been accused of cultural appropriation for wearing Fulani braids, which she referred to as "Bo Derek braids" (Nesvig 2020). Although Derek, a white woman, popularised this hairstyle in the film "10" in 1979, the history and cultural significance of the braids, which have African origins, were not acknowledged. Kardashian's appropriation of this hairstyle without understanding its cultural context has drawn criticism for disregarding the historical significance and appropriating a style that has deep cultural roots (Team ARD 2022).

Beauty Practices Among Nigerian Women

Nigeria is a country with more than 250 ethnic groups, each with its distinct cultural practices, including beauty standards and practices. These practices vary depending on socio-economic factors, individual preferences, regional differences, and cultural traditions. Each ethnic group has specific beauty practices that differ in terms of jewellery, makeup, clothing, hairstyles, and body art. In contemporary Nigeria, beauty practices are diverse and encompass a wide range of techniques such as skincare, clothing, body modification, hairstyles, and makeup. These practices have been influenced by various factors such as Western beauty ideals, modern global trends, fashion, media, and colonisation. Prior to British colonialism which lasted from 1900 to 1960, traditional beauty practices in Nigeria were unique to each ethnic group and included body painting, elaborate headgear tying, scarification, traditional adornments, traditional hairstyles, and body care using natural ingredients.

Different ethnic groups in Nigeria had unique traditional hairstyles and headgear tying techniques that varied based on their region, clan, or social status. These hairstyles often involved braiding, weaving, twisting, and styling natural hair and reflected cultural, social, and religious factors. They carried cultural significance and were worn with pride. For example, the Igbos, the ethnic group that *Americanah's* Ifemelu comes from had a traditional hairstyle called 'isi owu,' where the hair was divided into sections and rolled or twisted into small knots or loops with threads. Women in the southeastern and southwestern regions enjoyed tying elaborate headwraps, called 'Ichafu' in Igbo and 'Gele' in Yoruba, which involved expertly manipulating fabric to create a symbol of elegance and beauty.

The various tribes in Nigeria have a rich history of body art practices that are both diverse and fascinating. Body painting, which involved the application of natural pigments

or dyes to the skin in intricate patterns, was a common practice for special occasions, rituals, or celebrations among these tribes (Ikoro 2015). Additionally, natural ingredients such as shea butter, palm oil, coconut oil, local herbs, and other natural products were used for skin and hair care. Scarification was another body art practice that was common among certain ethnic groups in Nigeria, where intentional scarring or marking of the skin was used to create permanent patterns or designs. Traditional adornments, such as beads, necklaces, bracelets, and other forms of jewellery made from natural materials like shells, bones, stones, and beads, were also used to enhance physical beauty, express cultural identity, and showcase status or wealth.

The British colonial rule had a far-reaching impact on various aspects of Nigerian society, including politics, legal systems, language, and religion, particularly after the unification of Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria Protectorate in 1914 to create Nigeria as a single colony. Despite some positive effects, like economic and infrastructural development and the introduction of Western education, the negative effects, such as loss of autonomy, cultural suppression, economic exploitation, and social disruption, outweighed the benefits. Some scholars argue that the supposed benefits of colonial rule in Nigeria were actually aimed at serving the interests of the colonial masters (Ejeh 2001:13).

One significant consequence of colonialism was the erosion of Nigerian culture, which continues to affect Nigerian society today. This erosion of culture may have also contributed to the shaping of Eurocentric beauty standards and the transformation of beauty ideals from traditional and indigenous to those associated with European norms. Ejeh (2021) suggests that colonisation created a dynamic where the colonists established a sense of superiority and inferiority between themselves and the colonised. Africans were manipulated to look down upon their own culture, fellow Africans, values, and identity and instead adopt European values and languages to serve the interests of the Europeans.

This resulted in a distortion of the mind where the colonised despised their own culture, values, and identity and unquestioningly embraced the ways of the coloniser without critical analysis. As a result, traditional perceptions of beauty gradually gave way to beauty ideals associated with the colonisers. The adoption of European beauty ideals was also facilitated by the colonial economy, which introduced Western cosmetics and skincare items and portrayed them as luxurious and superior, leading to the adoption of these products by Nigerians who aspired to Western beauty ideals. Furthermore, European beauty standards were propagated through the media, where European models and actresses were presented as the epitome of beauty and glamour.

The impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Nigeria continues to persist beyond the colonial era and is now perpetuated by globalisation, media, and social media. This can be observed through the prevalent use of imported skincare products and the widespread adoption of Western fashion choices. The media and social media platforms have contributed to the promotion of Western beauty standards leading to the popularity of beauty products and treatments marketed by global beauty brands. For instance, skin lightening products, makeup, and other beauty treatments that conform to Western beauty ideals are commonly used in Nigeria. However, the practice of using skin lightening products to achieve a lighter skin tone is a controversial beauty trend in Nigeria with potential long-term health and psychological consequences (Olumide 2017). This practice is a result of the enduring legacy of colonisation, which fostered the belief that lighter skin is linked to superior beauty and social status. Consumers of skin bleaching products associate darker skin with traits such as inferior beauty and low social class, often viewing it as stereotypically linked to economic disadvantage and struggle. They believe that achieving fairer skin will increase their social capital and enhance their attractiveness.

The popularity of Western hairstyles and the use of hair relaxers, weaves, wigs, and extensions is another example of a shift away from traditional Nigerian hair trends. These products have become widely available in Nigeria due to globalisation and are heavily advertised through traditional media and social media platforms. As a result, many Nigerians view straight hair as a fashionable and modern look, while natural or "virgin" hair is deemed unattractive and unkempt by some. Chemical relaxers, hot irons, and other hair treatments are commonly used to achieve a straight hair texture, and the market for wigs and hair extensions is thriving in Nigeria as many women prefer to wear them. However, the preference for straight hair is not solely motivated by a sense of inferiority or a desire to emulate a European appearance. For many Nigerian women, it is more practical and cost-effective to style straight hair than their natural, textured, and kinky hair. Unlike Black women in the US, most Nigerian women do not feel compelled to express their identity through their hair since everyone around them is Black, except perhaps immigrants from the global North. Nigerian women do not face the same discrimination as their American counterparts do in the workplace for wearing their hair in a way that differs from the "norm. "Therefore, for many women in Nigeria, wearing natural hair is less about making a political statement and more about appreciating their natural hair and avoiding the potential harm caused by chemical relaxers.

Social media platforms, in particular, have played a significant role in shaping beauty practices in Nigeria. Influencers, celebrities, and beauty bloggers on social media often promote Western beauty trends, influencing Nigerian consumers to adopt these practices. This influence has also meant that as the natural hair movement of the 2010s held sway in the US, social media played a big part in importing the trend and popularising it in Nigeria. This trend combined with the growing movement advocating for the appreciation of African features and the celebration of African beauty in recent years, has

brought about a resurgence of interest in indigenous beauty practices and traditional aesthetics in Nigeria and other African countries.

Finally, beauty standards in the United States of America and Nigeria are comparable in the sense that the beauty practices of both countries have been impacted by Eurocentric beauty standards. However, the differences in historical, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances that influenced beauty practices in both nations have led to drastically different experiences for black women in both countries. The historical and societal factors that have influenced beauty practices among Blacks in the US and Nigeria provide important context for the empirical analysis in the next section of this thesis. By understanding the roots of Eurocentric beauty standards and their impact on Black individuals, we can more fully appreciate the complexity of the beauty industry and the ways in which it has excluded and marginalized certain groups. This knowledge can inform our analysis of the characters in Americanah and their experiences with beauty, as well as shed light on broader issues of identity, race, and power dynamics. Moreover, this overview underscores the need for more diverse and inclusive representations of beauty in media and society, and highlights the potential for social change through collective action and advocacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Eurocentric standards of beauty have had a significant impact on individuals worldwide, particularly people of African descent who are often excluded from these standards. In recent years, the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards has been explored in various fields, including literature. The aim of this section of my thesis is to provide an overview on previous studies on beauty practices in Adichie's *Americanah.* Previous research has attempted to analyse *Americanah* from varying perspectives. Some studies analyse the novel from postcolonial and black feminist perspectives, exploring themes such as the relationship between black hair politics and identity, and the role of the media in propagating negative stereotypes about black hair and skin. Others explore how beauty functions as social capital in the novel, while some others have been more focused on examining the psychological consequences of white beauty ideals.

Psychological Effects of Eurocentric Beauty Standards in Postcolonial Contexts.

Postcolonial theory which focuses on the cultural, economic, and political impact of colonialism on previously colonised societies and their ongoing struggle for autonomy and identity is one of the theories with which Adichie's *Americanah* has often been analysed. One of the notable aspects often discussed by scholars in their analysis of the novel from a postcolonial perspective is the relationship between black hair politics and identity. Schuchi &Josephine Zote (2020) explore the issue of identity and how it is projected through the politics of hair, which according to them, is linked to the legacy of slavery and colonialism. Their paper analyses how the protagonist of *Americanah,* Ifemelu, has to navigate her identity formation process in America where race is the primary determinant of difference, unlike her experience in Nigeria where ethnic identity was the main factor. Citing Ayana Byrd & Lori Tharps (2014), Schushi & Zote (2020) they argue that the

Eurocentric beauty standards used today to measure black people's physical attributes, is an extension of the degradation that began in the postcolonial era. During that period, slave raiders asserted their power through the exploitation of the slaves' kinky hair. They claim that the shaving of the slaves' head by the European slave masters was not merely a sanitary measure, but was the first step in the redefinition, or better still, the erasure of the slaves' cultural identities, a deliberate act to "alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair" (Byrd & Tharps 2014; Shuschi & Zote 2020). Schushi & Zote (2020) is relevant to my study because it provides a context for a deeper understanding of the present-day effects of Eurocentric beauty standards on black people. It also helps to identify the ways in which these standards have been used to perpetuate systemic racism and discrimination against black people.

In a similar vein, the relationship between black hair and identity is explored by Gilani & Ranjan (2022). Their research is relevant and similar to my research in the sense that it looks into the psychological nature of the exploitation of immigrants through "utopian beauty concepts" (Gilani& Ranjan 2022), and the consequences of this exploitation. Their paper uses the psychoanalytic thought of Frantz Fanon, a postcolonial scholar whose works used psychoanalysis to address complicated colonial mental conceptions of blackness to highlight the psychological exploitation of African immigrants in the United States of America, and how the dominant white culture forces these immigrants to conform to its beauty standards, leading to the loss of their cultural identity and self-alienation. Gilani & Ranjan (2022) also analyse how the portrayal of the immigrant protagonist, Ifemelu, highlights the prevalent Black stereotypes in white material culture, and also raises the issue of how this racial and ethnic minority community is made an easy target by white utopian beauty concepts.

They examine what it means to be a Black immigrant in the West and the psychological adjustments that occur in the immigrant in order for them to fit in with Western civilization. Gilani and Ranjan (2022) assert that by compelling immigrant African characters like Ifemelu and her aunt Uju to alter their natural appearances, thus alienating them from themselves, the American workspace exploits them psychologically, and subjects them to dealing with a "massive psycho-existential complex" (Fanon 1967 in Gilani & Ranjan 2022). The authors posit that as their desire to fit in and survive makes these characters accept white superiority standards and also allow themselves to be robbed of their black cultural identity, they acquire what Fanon refers to as "white masks". "White masks", according to Fanon in his book "Black Skin, White Masks" refers to the masks that black people wear to conform to the expectations and standards of white society. He argues that Black people are forced to wear these masks as a means of survival in a white-dominated society. By conforming to white norms, Black people hope to gain acceptance, success, and social mobility. However, this conformity comes at a cost, as it often requires denying one's own culture and identity, and can lead to a sense of alienation and self-hatred. Fanon believed that the only way for Black people to overcome this psychological oppression was to reject the white masks and embrace their true identity, culture, and history.

The identity dilemma suffered by African Americans and which Du Bois's in his *Souls of Black Folk* refers to as "twoness" or "double-consciousness" is another aspect of *Americanah* that is examined in Gilani & Ranjan's (2022) study. This dilemma is a situation whereby some African Americans are caught in a predicament where they are unsure whether to see themselves as distinct from their white counterparts in the US because they come from different cultural backgrounds, or whether to consider themselves a fusion of both cultures. Gilani & Ranjan (2022) argue that this dilemma of

double-consciousness is evident in the identities of the black female characters in the novel. Faced with the decision to comply or not to the white beauty standards in the American workforce, they are torn between maintaining their natural appearances and individuality, and conforming to the expectations of the American society. Dina Yerima's (2017) paper, "Regimentation or Hybridity? Western Beauty Practices by Black Women in Adichie's *Americanah*", echoes Gilanai & Ranjan's views on the dilemma faced by individuals of African descent and the uncertainty they struggle with about whether to perceive themselves as separate from their White counterparts in the United States due to their different cultural heritage, or to view themselves as a blend of both cultures. Her research on Adichie's *Americanah* examines the nature of the issues that plague postcolonial women, particularly their subjection to imperial/western notions of beauty. She explores the dilemma of the postcolonial subject, one whom she defines as a person who has experienced colonisation and is torn between their indigenous culture and the Western culture imposed by colonisers. This conflict results in a hybrid culture that may favour one culture over the other. This subject, according to her, is often from a colonised nation where foreign values have been imposed, particularly by occidental nations, and continues to experience their influence through globalisation.

Yerima's study is of relevance to my research because the historical impact of colonialism and imperialism has affected the perspectives and experiences of those in postcolonial societies, like *Americanah'*s Ifemelu, including their perceptions of beauty and self-esteem. Like Gilani &Ranjan (2022), Yerima (2017) claims that the dilemma of the postcolonial subject, and how this individual, male or female, often struggles to find a balance between the indigenous culture of his ancestors and the western culture of the conquerors. Therefore, rather than live in accordance with the dictates of either culture, the disparity between these aforementioned cultures creates an imbalance in the postcolonial

subject, and results in the emergence of a hybrid culture that combines both cultures. However, unlike Gilani and Ranjan (2022), she argues that the degree of this union varies from one person to another such that while some believe that the indigenous culture is superior to Western culture, the reverse is the case for others. Based on this premise, Yerima (2017) asserts that *Americanah*'s protagonist Ifemelu fits this description of a postcolonial subject, as in the early stages of her stay in the United States, she struggles with her allegiances to the two opposing forms of aesthetics- the indigenous one of her culture, and the imperial. Her flat-mates from uncolonized countries on the other hand are effortlessly confident in themselves, and express this confidence in an unabashed manner that communicates their acceptance of their femininity and comfort with their aesthetic preferences. Yerima's (2017) study concludes that the imposition of white aesthetic standards on people from culturally distinct races is a persistent psychological repression technique. It concludes also that the adoption of black hair in its natural form by the protagonist and some other female characters is a promotion of self-love and the reclamation of their black identity and consciousness. This opinion is especially relevant to my research as the second chapter of my thesis explores how the resistance to oppressive beauty ideals by the characters in Adichie's novel is a form of " self-care" as defined by Audre Lorde. Lorde's concept of self-care is a radical and political approach that emphasises the importance of self-preservation, self-love, and community building for marginalised individuals to resist and challenge systemic oppression, and will be discussed in the chapters to follow.

Another notable thing that is often discussed in the analysis of Adichie's *Americanah* is the psychological effects that the adoption of Imperial beauty ideals has on the characters in the novel. Yerima (2017) is of the view that the adoption of imperial notions of beauty is rooted in self-hatred, which is one of the psychological effects of

colonisation. She states that the social constructs of beauty in their society affect the characters' view of themselves, and makes them dissatisfied with their appearance and sexuality. This sentiment is echoed by Schishi & Zote (2020) who are of the view that the use of Eurocentric yardstick used to measure black people's physical attributes, constitutes a "dehumanisation of blackness" (Shuschi & Zote 2020), which has led to the acceptance of the existing social hierarchy, and has created a situation where blacks reject their own blackness. Similarly, Gilani & Ranjan (2022) argue that the imposition of white aesthetic standards on people from culturally distinct races is a persistent psychological repression technique.

Black Feminist Theory: Colorism and Media Representation of Beauty

Another theory with which Adichie's *Americanah* has also been previously analysed by scholars is the black feminist theory. This perspective is particularly relevant to my research as black feminist thought is one of the theories that I utilise in this thesis. Pardiñas (2014) investigates how popular culture depictions of black women affect their self-perceptions. Pardiñas argues that the media's portrayal of white women as the standard of beauty normalises images and race representations that oppress and exploit black people. Citing Bell Hooks (1992), she asserts that white supremacist ideals and media portrayals shape our perceptions of beauty and our understanding of the world. According to Pardiñas, black women frequently alter their appearance to conform to mass media beauty standards, which reinforces feelings of self-hatred. The lack of representation of black women in mainstream media increases the marketability and sales of products that allow them to look like the white "beauties" they see. Pardiñas' (2014) research posits that the issue of striving to unachievable white beauty standards is one that exists and that it is significant on a global level. For her, Ifemelu's perspective as an immigrant demonstrates that women in Nigeria and other African countries are also

adversely affected by this subjection to western ideals of beauty, not just because of the countries' colonial background, but also as a result of the and the near-absence of black women in mainstream representations of beauty, and because of the images that the global media has perpetuated. She concludes that *Americanah* is an important text for understanding colorism and the media's influence on beauty standards. Intercultural dialogues are recommended by Pardiñas to gain a better understanding of the histories and realities of other cultures.

Dasi (2019) and Yerima (2017) share similar opinions as Pardinas (2014) on the role of the media in promoting unrealistic and exclusionary beauty ideals that contribute to negative body image, low self-esteem, and discrimination against individuals who do not fit these ideals. Dasi posits that western media wields enormous power and functions as agents of cultural imperialism by endorsing Western values that subvert local cultures and resources, which could serve as the foundation for alternative development strategies. Hence it plays a huge role in the shaping of human thinking today, and has been used to reinforce the stereotypes and ideological systems that portray black beauty in a negative light. Western media propagates the view that black hair in its natural state is ugly and unprofessional. According to Dasi (2019), this fact is vividly illustrated in one of Ifemelu's blog posts where she refers to a TV show in which a black woman with natural hair that is coarse, coily, and kinky is portrayed as ugly "before and beautiful "after" her hair is straightened. Dasi argues that this is a veiled attempt to persuade black women to strive for "beautiful," "professional", and "normal" hair. This radicalised notion of beauty and professionalism implies that black women are compelled to modify their hair using relaxers and hot combs in order to conform to Anglo American beauty standards. Similarly Yerima (2017), asserts that the media, which is deeply rooted in Western culture where having a fair complexion is the standard, is responsible for promoting the idea that only

fair or white skin is desirable. As per her argument, the media's portrayal of this beauty standard is the reason why some characters in *Americanah* resort to harmful practices such as skin bleaching in an attempt to achieve a lighter skin tone.

Heterogeneity Among Women With Black Hair

While the previously discussed research seems to suggest a homogeneity in Black hair politics, some scholars contend that there should be heterogeneity in the exploration of Black hair politics. In examining Ifemelu's experience with the politics of black hair in the United States, Shuschi & Zote (2020) note that despite being a non-American Black woman, Ifemelu shares the experience with American Black women of having to alter her natural hair in order to "achieve a style that ... would afford them greater social and economic mobility" ((Johnson, & BanKhead (2014) in Schushi and Josephine (2020)). This makes it understandable therefore, that she is able to find a sense of home in the US through hair in a community of fellow black women with similar experiences. However, citing Vanessa King and Dieynba Niabaly's (2013) paper, they also argue that despite hair-related discrimination being a shared experience among black women in the United States, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity within the black community regarding ethnicity, culture, and experiences. According to the authors, the hair choices of African and African American women are influenced by various factors related to their distinct ethnic histories. Therefore, the research concludes that while Ifemelu's experience with black hair politics is important in understanding the identity of immigrant Africans in America, her struggle and reconciliation with her hair in the novel may not necessarily apply to all black women in America because of the complex and diverse identities within the black community.

A similar sentiment is echoed by Kerry Manzo (2016), however, while Schuchi & Zote recommend heterogeneity in the exploration of black hair politics because of the

diversity in ethnicity and cultural experiences, Manzo on the other hand provides a counterargument to the idea that black hair beauty standards are entirely derived from white beauty standards and are therefore a reflection of internalised racism. Manzo applies Bordieu's concepts of capital and cost to Adichie's novel and argues that all hair, irrespective of race, is social capital, and the manner in which hair is styled is the cost that the owner has to pay to become a member of a community or social group. This challenges the notion that black women are simply conforming to white beauty standards by altering their hair, as it is a worldwide practice to alter one's hair to meet economic and social needs through the negotiation of the capital and cost of social power within various social groups. His research helps to expand the understanding of the complexity of the issue of Eurocentric beauty standards in *Americanah* and offers a more nuanced perspective on the role of hair in social and economic capital and how it intersects with race, class, ideology, and region. Referencing *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness by Ingrid Banks* (2000), Manzo suggests that the significance of hair in *Americanah* and in American literature in general, is best analysed and understood in terms of networks rather than dualities. Instead, he posits that all hair, regardless of race, represents social capital, and the way hair is styled is the cost an individual must bear to join a particular community or social group. For Manzo (2016), the American professional class is a social class, and to become a member of this social class, one must adopt/conform to the signifiers of this class- straight hair. This, according to him, is the reason that Ifemelu straightens her hair, albeit unwillingly. The burns that she suffers from the chemical relaxers, and her feeling of loss from straightening her signature afro hair are physical and psychological costs that she has to pay to become a member of the American professional class. Manzo's opinion seems to explain why characters who are "privileged" to possess the social capital of the mainstream race like Kosy, a Nigerian with fair complexioned skin, and Ginika, who was

considered the prettiest girl in her Nigerian secondary school as a result of her mixed-race complexion, are endowed with privileges that their darker skinned counterparts do not get. It also explains why some other characters in *Americanah* like Aunty Uju, Bartholomew her boyfriend, and Aunty Onwenu the owner of Zoe magazine, bleach their skins in a bid to achieve the coveted social capital that is fair skin. Hence, for Manzo (2016) the fact that the signifiers of the American professional class are decided by the mainstream or dominant race is what constitutes racism in *Americanah*.

Previous research has examined the relationship between identity and hair politics, including the legacy of slavery and colonialism. It has also explored the identity formation process of African immigrants in America, which differs from their experiences in their home countries. Additionally, previous studies have investigated the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black people, including the perpetuation of systemic racism and discrimination, and also explored the impact of popular culture depictions of black women on their self-perceptions and how the media reinforces the notion that fair or white skin is the standard of beauty. However, there is still a research gap in understanding how these beauty standards affect the characters in Adichie's *Americanah*. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the novel through the lens of postcolonial theory, specifically Frantz Fanon's thoughts, and argue that the imposition of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black people is a form of oppression with far-reaching health and psychological consequences of internalised hatred. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how the characters in *Americanah* resist these oppressive beauty standards through the concept of self-care in Black feminist theory, as proposed by Lorde. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black people and expand our understanding of the ways in which literature can shed light on this issue.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned, this thesis draws from postcolonial theory, and black feminist theory to read Adichie's *Americanah*. These two theories are particularly relevant for my research because they provide frameworks for understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which Eurocentric beauty standards were constructed. Postcolonial theory highlights how colonialism impacts the colonised, including the internalisation and reproduction of colonial power dynamics by the colonised. Specifically, in relation to Eurocentric beauty standards, postcolonial theory explains how Western ideals of beauty were forced on non-Western societies during the colonial era and how these ideals are still reinforced in contemporary society. Black feminist theory, on the other hand, centres on the experiences and viewpoints of Black women and other marginalised groups, recognizing the intersectionality of race, gender, and other forms of oppression. This theory helps us understand how beauty standards are often rooted in Eurocentric ideals that exclude Black women, perpetuating oppressive systems that undermine their sense of self-worth and agency. This thesis will rely on the thoughts of the postcolonial scholar Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and also on the ideas of the black feminist Audre Lorde in her collection of essays and speeches, *Sister Outsider* (1984), and *A Burst Of Light And Other Essays (1988).*

Postcolonial Theory: Frantz Fanon

Frantz Fanon was a prominent figure in the field of postcolonial studies. His *Black Skin, White Mask*s was the first book to explore the psychology of colonialism, examining how it is internalised by the colonised, particularly in Africa, and how it leads to an inferiority complex, ultimately causing black people to emulate their oppressors through racism. His

book is a multi-layered work that examines the social construction of race, the concept of dual consciousness, the internalisation of racism, the politics of language, and the search for identity. Fanon employs an autoethnographic approach to discuss his personal experiences, combining them with a critical analysis of how racism and dehumanisation in colonialism have affected the human mind throughout history. He uses his own experiences to not only understand society, but also the challenges he has faced as a result of racism, both economically and psychologically. Although much has changed since *Black Skin, White Masks* was written, the underlying structures of oppression and injustice persist. The legacy of the Empire still shapes the national identities, politics, and cultures of countries in the global north, while previously colonised countries continue to be impacted by the psychological effects of colonialism. Thus, while direct colonial rule may have ended, other forms of oppression, including cultural, economic, political, and knowledge-based oppression, continue to thrive. Therefore, Fanon's voice is just as important today as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, if not more so. He believed that the nature and mode of operation of oppression were irrelevant, as all forms of exploitation are applied against the same "object": humanity. The overarching message of *Black Skin, White Masks* is that colonialism and racism have a profound impact on the psychological well-being of black people, and that the struggle for liberation requires not just political and economic change, but also a deep-seated transformation of consciousness and identity. Fanon's postcolonial thoughts in *Black Skin, White Masks* especially his thoughts on internalised racism are particularly relevant to the analysis of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah* and to the broader postcolonial context in which the novel is situated. This is because the theme of internalised racism and its impact on Black identity is central to Adichie's *Americanah* and is closely linked to the novel's exploration of Eurocentric beauty standards.

Identity Formation: Dual Consciousness

Fanon explores the negative effects of colonisation in order to identify its influence on the formation of black identity and how it produces a sense of alienation in black people. He argues that colonialism deprives colonised people of their culture, identity, and even their own sense of existence, creating in them a profound sense of displacement and alienation. Fanon claims that colonial racism dissuades black people from colonised nations, like his own country Martinique, from identifying with Africans, leaving them bereft of a sense of belonging, and leading to the complete alienation of the colonised people. He draws from his personal experiences of being educated in Martinique, a French Caribbean colony, where he was taught to reject his black identity and embrace French culture. He points out that in a similar fashion, colonialism has influenced the Antillean, a black person from the Antilles (a citizen of Antilles, a group of islands in the Caribbean), to adopt white behaviour subjectively and intellectually. However, in reality, they remain black and will only realise this when they leave the colony and travel to Europe.

> "The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about "our ancestors, the Gauls," identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth… Because the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself as well as the Senegalese." (Fanon, 2008: 114)

In other words, despite trying to identify with white European culture, the Antillean will ultimately realise their blackness and connection to the African diaspora once they travel to Europe and hear themselves being referred to as "Negroes" alongside other black people. This is because all other aspects of a black person's ethnic identity are erased in Europe, and the person's identity is reduced to their skin colour.

This situation where the colonised is forced to adopt the culture and values of the coloniser, while simultaneously being excluded and oppressed, creates a psychological tension between the colonised person's authentic self and the idealised image of the white

coloniser. Thus, they have a different sense of self depending on whether they are interacting with white people or other black people. This dual consciousness, Fanon believes, can lead to a sense of internal conflict and confusion about one's identity:

> "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question." (Fanon, 2008: 8)

That is to say that when a black person is among fellow black people, they express themselves fully and embrace their cultural heritage without fear of judgement. However, in a colonial and racist society, a black person is always conscious of their race and the negative stereotypes associated with it. In order to survive under the oppressive system of colonialism the person has to modify their behaviour and demeanour to conform to the expectations of the white majority and hide any aspects of themselves that could be seen as "other" or threatening. Due to this dual consciousness, black people may behave differently depending on whether they are interacting with white people or other black people. When interacting with white people, they may take a defensive or submissive approach, in order to avoid conflict or violence but feel free to express themselves fully and assert their cultural identity when with their fellow blacks.

Fanon's thoughts on the existence of "two dimensions" in the colonised black person is similar to Web Du Bois' idea about "double consciousness" in the African American. Du Bois was an American sociologist, civil rights activist, and writer. He is of the opinion that African-Americans have two conflicting identities or a split sense of self as a result of living in a culture that marginalises and oppresses them. In his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois defines "double consciousness" as "the sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1903: 3). He believes that an African Americans "ever feels his twoness,—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, 1903: 3). In other words, the African American is continuously caught between their own sense of identity and how they were perceived and treated by the dominant white society. This creates a sense of duality or tension in their consciousness, as they must navigate both their own cultural identity and the dominant cultural norms of the society in which they live. Fanon's concept of a double dimension and Du Bois' "double consciousness" describe a psychological state of being caught between two conflicting identities or cultural norms, and both have been used to analyse the experiences of marginalised and subjugated groups. However, Du Bois is not considered a postcolonial writer as his work predates the emergence of postcolonial theory and literature. Therefore, the similarity between Fanon and Du Bois' concepts of a double consciousness in marginalised people is an interesting one. Du Bois's awareness of this idea already in 1903, when empires were in full power, demonstrates that even during peak colonial times, there were people who were aware of the violence inherent to racial hierarchies inscribed to colonialism.

Internalised Racism

Another consequence of the experience of colonisation and the binary system it creates is the internalisation or "epidermalization" of the racist attitudes of the coloniser by the colonised, thus leading to feelings of inferiority, internalised racism, and self-hatred. Colonialism, Fanon posits, instils in the minds of the colonised a disdain for their own racial identity and an inclination to distance themselves from other members of their race who are deemed to exemplify negative stereotypes about black people (Fanon, 2008: 114). An exploration of books and magazines which were originally created by "white men for little white men" reveals how cultural representations are used to shape racist ideologies and perspectives in various colonies through "a constellation of postulates, a series of

propositions that slowly and subtly /…/ work their way into one's mind and shape one's view of the world" (Fanon, 2008: 118). Two good examples of literature that propagated these racist and imperialist ideologies at the time are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and "The White Man's Burden"' by Rudyard Kiplin. The former is a book which depicts Africa and its people as primitive and savage, while the latter is a poem that promotes the idea that it is the duty of white Europeans to "civilise" and "improve" the non-white people of the world. Fanon points out the heroes in this literature are always depicted as white, even in colonies with a predominantly black population. Furthermore, black people are often represented as non-human and savage (Fanon, 2008: 113), as white people tend to see their difference as a species difference. This kind of representation reinforces the idea that to be heroic, one must be white. This results in a psychological crisis in black children who identify with these heroic "adventurers" as they realise that they themselves were not a hero all along. They are rather the dangerous savage belonging to unexplored lands being discovered by the hero. This skewed representation, Fanon argues, leads to a desire to become white in order to be a hero, since there are no representations of Black heroes. It plays a significant role in shaping children's attitudes and beliefs about race and identity and influences their behaviour as they grow older.

Ziauddin Sardar, in the foreword to 2008 edition of *Black skin, White masks*, posits that in Fanon's view, as the colonised person begins to see himself through the eyes and values of the coloniser, their self-identity and self-esteem are eroded:

> "... His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behaviour is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man." (Fanon, 2008: xiii)

As a result, the colonised individual becomes obsessed with emulating white behaviour to gain acceptance, ultimately leading to a dynamic of inferiority. Fanon asserts that this internalised hatred also stems from the collective unconsciousness of society that associates whiteness with purity, justice, and other positive qualities:

> "Indeed no, the good and merciful God cannot be black: He is a white man with bright pink cheeks. From black to white is the course of mutation. One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent." (Fanon, 2008: 36)

while blackness is associated with immorality, sin, and darkness:

> "Everything that is the opposite of /…/ negro modes of behavior is white. This must be recognized as the source of Negrophobia in the Antillean. In the collective unconscious, black = ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality. In other words, he is Negro who is immoral. If I order my life like that of a moral man, I simply am not a Negro" (Fanon, 2008: 149).

This mindset which is created and promoted by the colonial master leads to a devaluation of blackness, and this in turn results in the colonised person feeling the need to reject their identity to be considered moral or acceptable. Consequently, many black people spend their lives attempting to demonstrate that they are "less black" than other black people and "essentially white" to white people, which only compounds their confusion about their own identity and complicates their relationships with both black and white individuals.

In order to further illustrate how colonialism and racism affect the psyche of the colonised, Fanon cites Lucette Ceranus, who wrote the semi-autobiographical novel *I Am a Martinican Woman* in 1948 under a pen name, Mayotte Capécia. According to Fanon, Capécia's work demonstrates how colonised people can adopt the dominant culture's beliefs and values, leading to feelings of self-hatred and a rejection of their own cultural heritage. He also suggests that this situation also prevents some black people from having healthy relationships. Mayotte is depicted as being subservient to the white man that she loves. She loves him because of his whiteness and hopes that by being with him, she can become white, "lactify" herself. Fanon used the term "lactification" to describe the experience of Black women attempting to become white. Mayotte's longing to be associated with whiteness is more important to her than her desire for a healthy relationship, and so "she asks nothing, demands nothing, except a bit of whiteness in her life " (Fanon, 2008: 29), despite knowing that "a woman of colour is never altogether respectable in a white man's eyes. Even when he loves her", she still dedicates her life to this irrational goal (Fanon, 2008: 29).

This internalised hatred that Mayotte suffers from is also evident in some other female Martinicans who insist that they will never marry a black man “for anything in the world” (Fanon, 2008: 33) because it is simply a matter of fact that being white is better. In another instance, Fanon recalls a time when a girl he knew got angry when he referred to her as a “black woman”, even though it was an accurate description. The girl vehemently denied being black and expressed her disdain for black men, using derogatory language to describe them, “Can’t you see I’m practically white?” she said (Fanon, 2008: 35). He goes on to mention another black girl who keeps a list of dance halls in Paris where black men were not likely to be found. These black women actively avoid socialising with black men, perhaps due to the stigma associated with being black in French society. Their actions highlight the impact of racism on the psyche of black people, which leads some to reject their own identity as they strive to distance themselves from their own racial identity in order to assimilate and gain social acceptance in white-dominated spaces (Fanon, 2008: 35).

According to Fanon, the denial of experiences and resources to black people in a racist society is the reason black people, such as Mayotte and the other black women he writes about, struggle with their racial identity and aspire to become white. Their experiences create feelings of inferiority and a perception that their lack of opportunity is the result of their Blackness rather than systematic racism. As a result, they attempt to shed their Blackness in order to become humans. Fanon acknowledges that while it is not true that whiteness is inherently superior to blackness, societies structured around racism perpetuate this falsehood. He recognizes that in French society, white people have more advantages than black people and therefore does not condemn these people for their desires. However, he is concerned that their acceptance of the superiority of whiteness is

dangerous as it reinforces the myth of white superiority and perpetuates the self-hatred that fractures black identity, rather than challenging the perception of black people as inferior.

Fanon himself reflects on his personal psychological experience as a black man to portray how the internalisation of beauty standards in his racist society has a debilitating impact on his ability to determine the meaning of blackness in its own right. All his life, he lived in a society where he was required not only to be black but, he "must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 2012: 83) and black people were constantly measured against whiteness and forced to define themselves in relation to whiteness. The deeply ingrained beauty standards in this society associate whiteness with beauty and goodness, and these qualities were never associated with blackness:

> "I am white: that is to say that I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the colour of the daylight. . . ." (Fanon, 2008: 31).

This seems to suggest that being white is equivalent to possessing beauty and virtue. The comparison to daylight, which is often associated with brightness, purity, and goodness, reinforces this idea that whiteness is the standard of beauty and goodness. Fanon insinuates that he internalised this pervasive and harmful societal standard of beauty that excludes and marginalises black people, and describes feeling uncomfortable in his own skin and feeling like his own appearance is ugly compared to the white ideal:

> "All this whiteness that burns me. I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?" (Fanon, 2008: 86)

However, he ultimately questions the very concept of beauty itself and who gets to define it and seems to arrive at the conclusion that beauty is subjective and that the standards of beauty that he has been taught to internalise are not necessarily universal or objective.

Fanon asserts that another evidence of the inferiority complex that has been instilled in the black man through colonialism is particularly clear in the educated black man's penchant for all things European. The educated black man suffers more intensely from this inferiority complex than his uneducated counterpart. Citing Professor D.

Westermann, in *The African Today*, argues that in order to overcome this feeling of inferiority, educated black people resort to various naive tactics such as imitating European clothing, furniture, and social norms. Additionally, they may also incorporate European expressions and use bombastic language in their speech or writing to feel equal to Europeans and their accomplishments (Westermann in Fanon, 2008:14). Unfortunately, by imitating European ways, these black individuals further perpetuate the very systems of oppression that contribute to their feelings of inferiority.

Some researchers, such as Manoni in his book *Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of Colonisation* (1948), have proposed that black people develop an inferiority mentality from birth that colonialism feeds on. However, Fanon rejects the "dependency" argument, which holds that Black people are colonised because they inherently feel inferior and hence seek to be subjugated. He contends that colonialism creates and sustains this sense of inferiority, and that there can be no inferiority complex without white people producing it:

> "The feeling of inferiority of the colonised is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior." (Fanon, 2008: 69)

This suggests that contrary to Manon's opinions, the psychological issue is not inherent in blackness, but rather the result of a racist society. He further emphasises that, in reality, black people do not consider themselves to be black until a white racist culture forces that label on them. People typically only consider themselves to be human beings until someone else categorises them as subhuman due to their skin colour, such as labelling them as "black men" rather than simply "men."

> "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others." (Fanon, 2008: 82)

He goes on to also state that:

> "As long as he remains among his own people, the little black follows very nearly the same course as the little white. But if he goes to Europe, he will have to reappraise his lot. For the Negro in France, which is his country, will feel different from other people. One can hear the glib remark: The Negro makes himself inferior. But the truth is that he is made inferior." (Fanon, 2008: 112)

In other words, it is when Black people interact with white people, and white people enforce that they are different from Black people, that they develop a deep sense of self-consciousness and self-doubt. It is a racist society where Black individuals are no longer seen as unique individuals but as representatives of their race, which deprives them of their humanity and reduces them to merely their race: “I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors…But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men” (Fanon, 2008: 85). Furthermore, in a racist society, the identity of a Black person is defined Eurocentrically, that is, in relation to European whiteness. In such a society, Blackness is defined as “not white,” and the white man becomes the norm or the standard by which all others are judged. This dynamic is not simply a matter of perception or attitude, but is actively enforced by the structures of society, thus creating a psychological burden for black people, who are forced to constantly compare themselves to white people and to strive for a standard that is not attainable. This makes it difficult for the black man to define his identity outside of racist and colonialist lenses, and makes him to view himself “in third person” (Fanon, 2008: 84).

Decolonization

In addition to exploring the psychology of colonialism that results in the internalisation of colonialism and the development of an inferiority complex in the colonised, Fanon is also particularly concerned with the eradication of these issues. He advocates for decolonisation and proffers ideas that are required to address the dehumanisation caused by the colonial process. Decolonization, according to Fanon, is a transforming process that is required for the fulfilment of human freedom and dignity. It is not just a political or economic process but a deeply cultural and psychological transformation for both the

colonised and coloniser that involves the colonised regaining their culture and identity, as well as the coloniser acknowledging their role in violence and the oppression of the colonised. It entails entirely dismantling the colonial system and establishing a new, oppression-free society. It also involves the colonised regaining their culture and identity, as well as the coloniser acknowledging their role in violence.

Fanon notes that to achieve decolonization, there needs to be a radical transformation of social and political structures and a redefinition of national identity. He rejects the notion of a "white world" with specific white morality and intelligence and advocates for a complete break with the past and a confrontation with the brutality of colonialism. For this to happen, both black and white people have to move beyond the voices of their ancestors and forget about superiority and inferiority. Fanon acknowledges that the problems faced by colonised individuals from various regions are distinct and will require unique resolutions. However, he also states that merely appealing to logic or the concept of human worth is insufficient to effect change in any society. In certain situations, direct confrontation may be the sole solution. He encourages black people to resist being defined in opposition to whiteness, to "be actional" in their resistance and to not expect that only "appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality" (Fanon, 2008: 173). That is the only way they can transfer the world which insists on defining them. He also highlights that self-worth has to be discovered, not taught. This requires moving beyond the slave mentality of the past and living in the present.

Although Fanon's work on racial dialectics is highly significant, he does not fully acknowledge the complexity of the Black woman's experience, as was seen in the above example with Mayotte. Wahl (2021) asserts that Fanon's framework of liberation and resistance from racial oppression fails to recognize the multiple layers of oppression that Black women face, such as racism and sexism combined. According to her, Fanon

contextualises his arguments using language that solely centres around men, with a default assumption of personhood being male. This language excludes the experiences of Black women and their multidimensional identity. Fanon only considers Black women in relation to men, either Black or White, and their sexual relationships with men. Women are granted identity only when in relation to men and not as themselves. This limitation in Fanon's perspective disregards the multiple forms of oppression that Black women face and the unique experiences that they have. Therefore, while Fanon's work on postcolonial theory provides a valuable understanding of the general workings of colonialism and postcolonialism, Black feminist theory, which focuses specifically on the experiences of Black women and recognizes the interconnectedness of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression is necessary to understand black women's experiences of these issues.

Black Feminist Theory- Audre Lorde

Black feminist theory is a framework for understanding and challenging the unique experiences of black women, who are often marginalised and oppressed by both racism and sexism. This theory emerged in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of feminist theories, which tended to focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women and overlooked the intersecting oppressions faced by women of colour. Black feminist theory focuses on the experiences and perspectives of black women and recognizes the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of identity in shaping individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. Rather than concentrating just on individual acts and attitudes, black feminist theory emphasises the need of recognizing and opposing structural and institutionalised forms of oppression. The necessity of solidarity and coalition-building among marginalised groups is also emphasised in black feminist thought. In order to create a more just and equitable society for all, black feminists have

worked to form alliances with other oppressed groups, such as LGBTQ+ people, persons with disabilities, and others.

Audre Lorde (1934-1992) was a Black feminist writer, poet, and activist who explored themes of race, gender, sexuality, and social justice in her work. Lorde's thoughts in her essays "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer", and "Learning from the 60s" are particularly useful in exploring this thesis. In these essays, she explores issues such as the mythical norm, the idea that there is a "normal" or "default" human experience that is based on white, heterosexual, middle-class men, and also critiques essentialist views that erase the diversity and complexity of women's experiences. She argues for a more nuanced and intersectional approach to social justice activism, one that recognizes the limitations of traditional forms of activism and embraces diversity and creativity in the pursuit of justice. Lorde also emphasises the importance of self-care, community support, and the need for radical change in the face of systemic oppression. Audre Lorde's work provides a valuable perspective on the experiences of Black women and the ways in which they can resist oppression. Her ideas on the mythical norm, self-care, and differences within marginalised communities are particularly relevant to understanding the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah.*

The Mythical Norm

In one of her speeches "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", given in 1980, and later published in her collection of essays *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde discusses the "mythical norm" as part of her critique of essentialist views of womanhood. The mythical norm is the idea that there is a "standard" against which all people are measured, and those who do not fit this standard are seen as deviant or inferior. Lorde

argues that the mythical norm is often based on white, heterosexual, middle-class men, and that this norm is used to silence and marginalise those who do not fit this mould. Lorde suggests that the trappings of power and privilege within American society are closely tied to adherence to this mythical norm and anyone who doesn't fit the mould is subjected to a form of oppression from society.

> "Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society." (Lorde, 2012: 116)

Therefore, Lorde (2012: 114) notes that in order to survive in a society where oppression is pervasive, members of oppressed groups who are often seen as "other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong" have had to become familiar with "the language and manners of their oppressors." This involves adopting their ways of thinking and behaving in order to blend in or protect themselves. However, she suggests that this adoption is often illusory and does not offer real protection or empowerment. Instead, it perpetuates the myth of the norm and reinforces the power dynamics that keep marginalised groups oppressed. Lorde's idea is similar to Fanon's thoughts on black people who attempt to shed their blackness in order to gain access to privileges that are denied them as a result of their race. Their ideas are also similar in the sense that they both recognize that the adoption of dominant culture and behaviour is a means of survival for oppressed individuals, and acknowledge the dangerous consequences of adopting the norms and values of the oppressor. However, their thoughts differ in the sense that while Lorde suggests that the adoption of the oppressor's ways is illusory and does not offer real protection or empowerment, Fanon recognizes the societal advantages afforded to white people and the resulting pressures on Black people to conform.

Lorde points out one of the ways that women's movement of her time may have been inadvertently aiding the perpetuation of other forms of oppression like the "mythical norm". She argues that one of the dangers of mainstream feminism is the focus on gender

as the main basis of discrimination and oppression by white feminists and their inability to acknowledge other forms of discrimination. According to Lorde, there is a tendency to prioritise the experiences and concerns of white women over those of women who also faced discrimination based on their race, sexual orientation, class, or age. She asserts that white women refuse to acknowledge that "in a patriarchal power system where white skin privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralise black women and white women are not the same" (Lorde, 2012: 118). They often act as though all women share a common experience and identity, referred to as "sisterhood," which ignores the realities of different types of oppression experienced by women from diverse backgrounds. According to her, this "pretence to a homogeneity of experience" (Lorde, 2012: 116) in addition to white feminists' failure to acknowledge their own privilege of whiteness hinders the movement's ability to address the specific and intersectional needs of all women. Furthermore, by defining womanhood solely in terms of their own experience, white women "otherize" women of colour, viewing them as outsiders with experiences that are too different to comprehend. This is exemplified by the lack of inclusion of literature written by black women in women's studies courses and other literature courses. Excuses are often given, such as the belief that only black women can teach these works or that they are too difficult to understand. These excuses reflect a failure to recognize the diversity of human experience and the need to actively work towards inclusivity and understanding (Lorde, 2012: 117).

It is Lorde's belief that the reason white women downplay or refuse to acknowledge that they an black women face different kinds of challenges from their society is rooted in guilt. This guilt stems from a recognition that they have benefited from privileges and advantages that black women have been denied as a result of their race. When white women are confronted with the realities of racism and how it has affected the lives of

women of colour, it can be difficult to reconcile their own experiences of sexism with the experiences of women of colour who have faced both racism and sexism. As a result, they are reluctant to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by women of colour or may downplay the significance of race in shaping women's experiences. She suggests that "refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women" (Lorde, 2012: 118), and perpetuates a patriarchal power structure that benefits some women at the expense of others. To move toward a more just and equitable society, it is necessary to acknowledge and address the differences that exist between women and to work to dismantle the power structures that uphold oppression and inequality.

Institutionalised Difference

Lorde contends that there is need for us to be cautious of the way we perceive differences in society, as Western European history has conditioned our view of human differences using binary oppositions, such as dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, and superior/inferior. She argues that this binary categorization is reflected in how we group people based on factors like race, gender, age, and class. This system of categorization of people reinforces the mythical norm by creating a hierarchical system where one group is dominant and the other is deemed inferior. This reinforces the power and control of the dominant culture, leading to the oppression and marginalisation of certain groups. Lorde identifies black and third world people, working-class people, older people, and women as groups that are systematically oppressed in Western society, facing various forms of discrimination and marginalisation (Lorde, 2012: 114).

She further asserts that "as we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals, /…/ those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion" by the capitalist society we live in today (Lorde,

2012: 115). In this system, there is a need for "outsiders" or "surplus people" who are seen as different from the dominant group:

> "As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate." (Lorde, 2012: 115)

In other words, for this profit-driven economy to thrive, an "institutionalised rejection of differences" is required to perpetuate fear and hatred towards those who are different. Thus, Lorde emphasises that although there are "very real differences between us of race, age, and sex", it is not the differences in themselves that cause division and separation between people. It is but rather the way in which these differences are perceived and labelled (Lorde, 2012: 115). Therefore, true feminist solidarity must be based on an intersectional analysis of power and oppression that recognizes the experiences and struggles of all women. It must recognize and honour differences in order to build a more just and equitable world that values all people, regardless of whether they fit the mythical norm or not.

Self-Care

Lorde believed that it is important for Black women to embrace their identities and resist societal pressure to conform. In her essays "Learning From The 60s", and "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer", she emphasises the importance of self-definition and self-care. In "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer", Lorde shares a distinct perspective on how Black women can resist oppression and discrimination. She proposes self-care as a means of healing from trauma and oppression, and cultivating resilience and resistance. Lorde emphasises the importance of self-care for Black women, centred on self-acceptance, confronting difficulties and hardships directly and, above all, prioritising one's own well-being.

In her writing, Lorde argues that caring for oneself "is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 2012). This seems to suggest that caring for oneself is not a selfish act, but is a form of resistance against oppressive systems, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. Lorde believes that these systems of oppression are deeply ingrained in society and often lead to feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and burnout for those who were marginalised (Lorde, 2017). Therefore, she argues that it is necessary for Black women to prioritise their own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being in order to resist these systems and maintain their own agency.

Lorde further stresses this need for self-definition and self-awareness in her "Learning From The 60s". She asserts that if she does not take control of her own identity and define herself on her own terms, others would define her, she would be "crunched into other people's fantasies for [her] and eaten alive" (Lorde, 2012: 137). Lorde's words encourage Black women to resist dominant groups that seek to impose their ideals and expectations on them and take ownership of their own lives and identities. It is also Lorde's belief that self-care is a way to build interconnectedness between individual and collective well-being such that strength and resilience can be shared with others. She sees self-care as a means of empowering both individuals and communities to oppose oppressive systems and develop a collective sense of strength.

The concepts discussed in this chapter will be employed in the following analysis on the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah.* Fanon's postcolonial thoughts explores the psychological impact of colonialism on the colonised, particularly on their sense of identity and self-worth, and how the colonised internalise the image of the coloniser as the standard of beauty, leading to a loss of identity and a sense of inferiority. On the other hand, Audre Lorde's ideas on the mythical norm, institutionalised

difference, and self-care are relevant because they can help analyse the ways in which eurocentric beauty standards are perpetuated and upheld in the novel, and the ways in which oppressive beauty standards can be resisted. The ideas of these two thinkers are relevant in the analysis of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah*, which explores the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who moves to the US and grapples with cultural differences and racial dynamics. By using both Fanon's postcolonial theory and Lorde's Black feminist theory, this thesis can provide a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah,* taking into account both the broader historical and social contexts of colonialism and the specific experiences of Black women. The combined use of these two theories offers a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which Eurocentric beauty standards intersect with race, gender, and other forms of oppression in *Americanah* and in broader society.

CHAPTER TWO

Eurocentric Beauty Standards As A Form Of Oppression In *Americanah*

In the United States, patriarchy oppresses women, and white supremacy oppresses black people, and women of colour are victims of these two oppressive systems (Green, 2020). Using hair as an entry point, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* examines the hardships and tensions of African immigrants in the United States to discuss significant and entrenched social concerns in the US and Africa. The pressure to conform to white beauty standards, particularly with regards to hair and skin colour, is a recurring theme that is imposed on the characters in *Americanah* (2013). The lives of the black characters in the novel are impacted by Eurocentric beauty standards in a way that affects their self-perception, identity, and relationships. Although the novel is set in the United States, the term "Eurocentric" is used when discussing beauty standards because it refers to the ways in which European features and cultural norms have historically been privileged and prioritised in the dominant beauty ideals of Western societies. These standards have been reinforced through various forms of media and cultural practices, resulting in a narrow and exclusionary beauty standard that often excludes people of colour and other marginalised groups. By using the term "eurocentric," scholars and researchers generally refer to the systemic and historical factors that have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of these beauty ideals globally. In this chapter, I argue that this subjection of black women to Eurocentric beauty ideals is a form of oppression with psychological consequences and identity issues such as low self-esteem, and internalised racism.

Lorde's idea about the mythical norm can be used to explain the several instances in *Americanah* (2013) where the novel's characters are subjected to white beauty

standards, and discriminated against for not meeting society's expectations, particularly with regards to their hair and skin. In the novel, as in real life, there is often a widespread perception that black women should have a particular appearance. A black woman's value in society and prospects of success in both her professional and personal life are frequently inversely correlated with how closely her characteristics resemble the Caucasian concept of beauty—for example, how long and straight her hair is and how light her complexion is (Walk-Morris 2021).

Ifemelu, the main character of *Americanah*, has spent most of her life wearing her hair in braids or in its natural form. However, she discovers to her astonishment that hair is one of the factors that can affect her chances of acquiring a job when she is looking for employment as an immigrant in America. She learns about this for the first time when her aunt, Uju, tells her about her intentions to apply for a position as a doctor after passing her medical examination. She confides in Ifemelu that she is self-conscious about how she looks and that she has to relax her hair and take out her braids before going on interviews, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (Adichie 146). When Ifemelu asks her if that means that there aren't any doctors in America with braided hair, Aunty Uju replies, "I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (146). The "what you have to do to succeed" in this case is to alter the appearance of their natural kinky hair to conform to the mythical norm of Caucasian-looking straight hair. Noliwe Rooks states that the relationship between relaxed hair and professionalism is that "its styling could provide the possibility of a career, while its style could lead to acceptance or rejection from certain groups and social classes" (Rooks, 1996). Aunty Uju's statement supports this notion as it implies that natural

hairstyles like braids are seen as unprofessional and will affect her chances of getting the job. Green (2020) also asserts that Aunty Uju's worry about the difficulty she might face in securing a job as a result of the appearance of her hair is a good illustration of how American professionalism is exclusive in nature. Her situation highlights the pressure that black people, especially black women, face to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards in professional settings, and the expectations that are imposed on black women by society which dictates their appearance and self-presentation. Similar to her aunt's advice, her "caramel-skinned" African American advisor, Ruth, tells her she needs to straighten her hair when she is scheduled for an interview in Baltimore. "Lose the braids and straighten your hair", she says. "Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job" (Adichie 250). Ruth's advice implies that no one will publicly state how having relaxed hair will be considered a sign of superiority among African or African Americans over others who want to keep their natural hair, which represents their identity and roots.

On another occasion, when Ifemelu goes to get her eyebrows waxed at a spa, the Asian beautician refuses to attend to her. She tells Ifemelu without any apologies, "we don't do curly". With this, she betrays her ignorance about black hair, and her blatant bias and discrimination against a customer simply because of her race. It is obvious that she assumes that the texture of a black person's brows and hair are the same. Perhaps she has never waxed a black woman's eyebrows and assumes it is different because, after all, their hair is different. However, given that she is a spa attendant in a country like America with a diverse racial population, one would have expected her to be knowledgeable about brow textures. The fact that she'd rather lose a customer than educate herself is evidence that for her, black hair is different, doesn't fit the norm, and is therefore not worth learning about. It takes Curtis, Ifemelu's white boyfriend yelling at the beautician and threatening to get their salon closed to change her mind: "The woman transformed into a smiling, solicitous

coquette. “I’m so sorry, it was a misunderstanding,” she said. Yes, they could do the eyebrows (Adichie 295). However, because of the beautician’s initial refusal, Ifemelu no longer wants her to wax her brows. She is afraid the woman may burn her, rip off her flesh, or pinch her, However, since unlike hair, black eyebrows are like those of other ethnicities, the attendant succeeds in doing it correctly.

This blatant discrimination against Ifemelu at the spa can be explained by black feminist Moya Bailey’s idea about “misogynoir*”,* a term she coined to explain how “black women and girls are being treated in a uniquely terrible way because of how societal ideas about race and gender intersect” (Bailey & Trudy 2008). Discrimination against black women because of their natural hair is one instance of misogynoir, and according to Green (2020) offensive perceptions about black women’s appearance have been reinforced and continue to be used as a justification for discrimination and exclusion in several private and professional contexts.

Physical and Psychological Consequences of Eurocentric Beauty Standards

The pressure to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty compels many black women to adopt unwholesome beauty habits. For instance, some black women resort to the use of skin bleaching creams and chemical hair relaxers. These beauty habits have serious and health related consequences. Recent studies are establishing a connection between the presence of certain chemicals in hair products and an increased risk of breast and endometrial cancer. (Llanos, 2022).

Bleaching cream use over an extended period has been linked to skin cancer (Zainy, 2015). Additionally, “relaxers” are anything but relaxing. A powerful mixture is used in the chemical procedure of “hair relaxing” to break-down the hair’s natural curl pattern and make it straight. The hair and scalp may become damaged by this harsh

chemical procedure. Additionally, there is strong scientific proof that continued use of chemical hair relaxers has negative effects on one's health (Llanos, 2022). Burns on the scalp and hair loss are two frequent side effects of hair relaxers. The chemicals in hair relaxers can damage the scalp. They can also make hair brittle and prone to breakage, which can result in hair loss. Ifemelu experiences both side effects when she relaxes her hair. At first she felt,

> "...only a slight burning,/.../, but as the hairdresser rinsed out the relaxer, Ifemelu's head bent backwards against a plastic sink, needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp, down to different parts of her body, back up to her head." (Adichie 2013: 211)

Also, a short period after relaxing,

> "...her hair began to fall out at the temples. She drenched it in rich, creamy conditioners, and sat under steamers until water droplets ran down her neck. Still, her hairline shifted further backwards each day" (Adichie2013: 214)

She is confused about what is happening to her hair until her friend Wambui explains that "It's the chemicals,"/.../ "Do you know what's in a relaxer?", she asks, "That stuff can kill you" (Adichie 2013: 214). Wambui's advice emphasises how dangerous chemical relaxers can be to the user with long term usage.

The pressure to maintain their appearance in accordance with Eurocentric ideals of beauty has long-lasting psychological effects on many black women (Jackson-Lowman 2013). It shapes their self-perception, leading to negative self-esteem issues and internalised racism (Patton 2006). Audre Lorde in her essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex; Women Redefining Difference" writes about how black victims of oppression adopt the ways of the oppressor as a survival strategy. She writes:

> "Those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection." (Lorde 2012: 114)

The problem with the adoption of the oppressor's signifiers is that it has psychological consequences for the oppressed. One of such consequences is the sense of identity loss some black women feel when forced to use chemical relaxers to straighten their hair when they would have preferred to wear their natural hair in braids or locks. This sense of loss is brought about by the fact that many black women wear their natural hair styles as a mark

of pride, resistance, and collective identity. Allowing their hair to grow naturally is also a way for them to embrace and celebrate their heritage and culture. It also gives black women a way to take back control of their bodies and identities from the restrictive norms that the mainstream culture has placed on them (Norwood 2018). Francis Nyamnjah and Divine Fuh in "Africans consuming hair, Africans consumed by hair" write that, "the social cultivation of hair [is] at the centre of personality construction, forming an axis in the determination of both individual and collective identity," and that "physical traits such as hair are core to identity making" (Nyamjah & Fuh 2014). Unfortunately, one of the cruel ironies of modern-day black existence is that people who succeed in attaining material advantages usually do so by sacrificing their positive ties to black culture and black experience (hooks 1992).

It could therefore be argued that by altering the natural appearance of their hair which defines their cultural and personal identity, and engaging in various beauty practices that make their appearance similar to those of their white counterparts, Ifemelu, Aunty Uju and other black women who are looking to improve their chances of acceptance into the American society which is discriminatory in nature, are sacrificing their connection to black culture and adopting the manners of the oppressor for "some illusion of protection" (Lorde 1984). This makes it easy for one to understand the "feeling of loss" that Ifemelu has the first time she perms her hair in preparation for a job interview. Her feeling of utter dejection is captured thus:

> "Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss." (Adichie 203)

The "something organic which should not have died," is in a sense her hair, and at the same time—an important part of her identity. One could argue that Ifemelu grieves the loss and sacrifice of her black identity in order to identify with America and its values.

As Ifemelu mourns the loss of her natural hair and is plagued with confusion about how to repair her damaged scalp and receding hairline, Wambui points out to her the absurdity of trying to force one's hair to do something it was never created to do in the first place:

> "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you… You're always battling to make your hair do what it wasn't meant to do. If you go natural and take good care of your hair, it won't fall off like it's doing now." (Adichie 208)

Wambui's advice suggests that relaxing one's hair is more than just a physical inconvenience. It is a practice that takes a toll on one's emotions as it requires a constant battle to maintain one's hair and make it conform to Eurocentric standards. The metaphor of being in prison and caged-in further emphasises the fact that relaxing one's hair, or chemically altering it to make it straight, is a form of confinement and restriction. The phrase "your hair rules you" implies that the pressure to conform to white beauty standards has a controlling and oppressive effect on black women.

Women of different races often practise hair straightening for various reasons, including practicality and the desire to make a statement. While straight hair is generally easier to manage than curly/kinky hair, some black women opt to straighten their hair for convenience, while others feel societal pressure to conform to expectations (Davis-Sivasothy 2011 in Ellis-Hervey et al. 2016). Some black women straighten their hair due to a dislike of their natural hair texture and a desire to fit in (Amemate, 2020). In Ifemelu's case, the reason for her significant sense of loss is that she doesn't straighten her hair for appearance-related reasons; she feels compelled to do so to secure employment as she expresses her frustration to her boyfriend in this quote:

> "My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky." (Adichie 204)

Charlotte Norwood, a black feminist, writes that "the linear classification that moves from light to dark and from straight to tightly coiled hair reflects a racialized hierarchy, where features most akin to the European aesthetic are more valued, more revered, more

compensated and just *mo better*" (Norwood, 2018). Norwood's opinion explains Ifemelu's situation, and further highlights how black women's natural hair is stereotyped and how it is never considered good enough unless it conforms to white ideals of beauty and professionalism.

In her blog post, "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor," Ifemelu writes about this pressure to conform, and about how:

> "Some black women […] would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair. Because, you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal." (Adichie 2013: 367)

Her argument in that post addresses how even highly educated and accomplished black women have been socialised to compromise their true selves and identity to conform to societal expectations. She posits that if Michelle Obama had embraced her blackness by styling her hair in braids or leaving it unstraightened, it may have cost her husband, Obama, the election. She would have been perceived as "too black" or as making a provocative racial or political statement, and that would have made white voters uncomfortable. Additionally, in the same blog post, she highlights the fact that most people outside the black community are unfamiliar with the appearance of natural black hair; "When you DO have natural Negro hair, people think you "did" something to your hair…We all love Bey[once] but how about she show us, just once, what her hair looks like when it grows from her scalp?" (Adichie 2013: 300)

Internalised Racism

Another effect of the subjection to western beauty ideals as seen in *Americanah* is the self-hatred it inflicts on the characters. In his books *The Wretched of the Earth (*1961*),* and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Frantz Fanon,addresses the concept of "internalised oppression" or "internalised racism," as explained in the previous chapter. He writes about how colonised people internalise the values, beliefs, and stereotypes imposed upon them

by their colonisers, and how this can lead to self-hatred and a loss of cultural identity. He states that the colonised people are trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of oppression, in which the colonised internalise the negative beliefs of the coloniser and begin to see themselves and their culture as inferior. Fanon also writes about how this internalised oppression can manifest in different ways such as in the form of self-rejection, self-doubt, and even self-destructive behaviour.

The issue of straightening one's hair has been a controversial topic for many years. While some scholars see it as a personal choice and a way to express their style and creativity, others believe that it is evidence of a desire to emulate a Caucasian appearance, and is therefore a proof of self-hatred. Some studies argue that "African women's reason for relaxing their hair is not necessarily a matter of internalised racism and self-hate but rather, an issue of style, versatility, and choice (Amemate, 2020)." In "Africans Consuming Hair, Africans Consumed by Hair", Francis Nyamnjoh and Divine Fu (2014) outline the opinions of some african women about the politics of black natural hair. Some argue that to imply that black women with weaves, relaxed hair, or braids are merely the victims of colonial conditioning is patronising. According to them, this claim makes the presumption that black women are incapable of making independent decisions and thinking for themselves. Also, since feminism is about women having the right to choose, dictating what a true African woman should look like is stripping them of choice. The real problem, they believe, is not the hair choice but the value attached to hair. If we see natural hair and think it is better than relaxed hair and vice versa, it is problematic. They argue that many mothers used hot combs to straighten their hair in the past—not because they were frantically trying to turn their hair white, but rather to make it easier to handle. This still serves as the justification for some mothers who use chemicals to relax their daughters' hair nowadays.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that black women engage in hair straightening practices because they hate their hair. In the 1900s, African American women's practice of straightening their hair was interpreted by civil rights leaders such as Marcus Garvey, and W.E.B Du Bois, as evidence of the racism they faced in America. Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps' in *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* (2001) assert that the practice of hair straightening can be traced to the era of slavery and is rooted in a desire to emulate the appearance of Caucasian people. They argue that long before the development of hair relaxers and the popularity of hot combs among African people, African Americans experimented with using lye, grease, and sheep fleece carding tools to manage their hair, beginning in the time of slavery. Their aim was to flatten their hair down to look like their enslavers or at least make it look presentable. Their views appear to explain the feelings of shame and inferiority that some characters in the novel have about natural hair. Aunty Uju and Ifemelu adopt the "manners of the oppressor" by taking down their braids and straightening their hair in order to achieve professional success. However, unlike Ifemelu, aunty Uju does not suffer the feeling of loss that Ifemelu does. At first glance, it may seem that Aunty Uju only succumbs to the oppressive and discriminatory beauty standards of American society voluntarily in order to be accepted and achieve professional success. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that there are deeper reasons for Aunty Uju's newly subdued personality beyond a mere desire to assimilate. The pressure to conform has gradually taken a toll on her mental state, to the extent that she now views the oppressor as superior and considers herself inferior, with her natural black hair being unattractive.

For instance, later in the novel, Ifemelu cuts off the relaxed part of her hair and begins to grow her natural hair once again. During a visit with her white boyfriend Curt to Aunty Uju's place, she remarks that Curt seems to genuinely like Ifemelu despite the

texture of her hair. "He really likes you, and even with your hair like/…/ jute", –It surprises her that Curt genuinely loves Ifemelu, jute-like hair and all, adding that "there is something scruffy and untidy about natural hair." Aunty Uju feels that Ifemelu should be grateful to have been found worthy of love despite having hair that, according to her, is "like jute". Ifemelu is shocked by Aunty Uju's loss of her previously bold and vibrant personality and is left wondering about the extent to which she has changed since she left Nigeria for America. She feels that "Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place" (Adichie 124).

Ifemelu herself isn't unaffected by the beauty demands of America. After it dawns on her that there is nothing she can do to salvage her damaged hair, she allows Wambui to convince her to cut and grow her hair afresh. Unfortunately, by this time, the American straight hair standard has already affected the way she sees her natural hair, and she too begins to suffer from self-hate. She gradually changes from the confident and carefree person she was when she first arrived in America, to one who feels ashamed of the appearance of her natural hair. "...She has internalised white supremacist values and aesthetics, a way of looking and seeing the world that negates her value" (bell hooks, 1992) She is so ashamed of the appearance of her natural hair and her "new" look that she calls in sick at work and hides away indoors. She finds it hard to appreciate her new appearance not just because the hair is short, but more importantly because her natural hair "looked unfinished, as though the hair itself, short and stubby, was asking for attention, for something to be done to it, for more." Looking at herself in the mirror, she tells Curt, "I hate my hair…" "I look so ugly I'm scared of myself". Even as she goes to the drug store in search of some miracle potion to change the texture of her hair, she hides it under a baseball hat. She is ashamed, frustrated, confused about what to do with her hair and wishes for

> "something, anything, that would make her like her hair. She thought of buying a wig, but wigs brought anxiety, the always-present possibility of flying off your head. She thought of a texturizer to loosen her hair's springy coils, stretch out the kinkiness a little, but a texturizer was really a relaxer, only milder, and she would still have to avoid the rain" (Adichie 214).

Internalised hatred for natural black hair is also evident in another character, the black hairdresser in the salon where Ifemelu gets her hair relaxed. The first time she relaxes her hair in America, despite the stinging pain and the burns from the chemical relaxer, the hairdresser "compliments" Ifemelu's now straight hair. "Just a little burn," she says. "But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!" (Adichie 208). For this hair-dresser, anything, including excruciating pain and a damaged scalp are worth it so long as she now has straight hair and the "white girl swing". Her "compliment" insinuates that-Ifemelu's hair, and by extension, Ifemelu herself, was not attractive when her hair was in its natural state, but is beautiful now that she has altered it to look like that of a white girl, and has now conformed to America's straight hair norm.

Resisting Oppressive Beauty Standards through Self-Care

Ifemelu's identity, self-image, and sense of self-worth deteriorate as a result of the institutionalised oppression in American society which compels her to change aspects of her appearance in order to meet the standards of the "mythical norm". I argue that the incident with the hair relaxer which results in a burnt scalp and hair loss for her can be seen as an important turning point in her journey towards self-discovery and self-acceptance. This incident prompts her to begin questioning the beauty standards she has internalised and to reflect on how they have shaped her sense of self. This experience becomes a catalyst for her to begin to examine the deeper cultural and societal forces that have influenced her perceptions of beauty and identity. By rejecting the idea that Black hair needs to look like white people's hair and taking the decision to embrace her natural hair, Ifemelu is able to challenge the mythical norm of sleek straight hair, and begin a process of self-acceptance and self-love. It is also around this time that she starts

expressing her thoughts and observations on race and identity in America and engages with others, and shares her experiences and insights in her blog "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black." As Ifemelu begins to accept herself, she engages in a variety of activities and behaviours that promote her well-being and help her to develop a greater sense of self-awareness and self-compassion. It is my position that the activities and behaviours that Ifemelu engages in as she resists the oppressive standards of beauty in American society and begins her journey to self-love can be described as self-care as defined by Audre Lorde.

Audre Lorde's argument in "A Burst of Light" centres on the idea that self-care is an essential tool for marginalised individuals to survive and thrive in a world that is often hostile to their existence. According to her and as mentioned above, "self-care is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 2012). Lorde was living with cancer at the time of writing this essay. She seems to imply that self-care is not an indulgence. It is looking out for one's well-being first and foremost. It is basically what you do to keep going. Lorde contends that oppressive structures are deeply rooted in a society. These structures often result in feelings of loneliness, tiredness, and burnout for individuals who are marginalised. Therefore, she asserts that Black women must prioritise their own physical, mental, and spiritual well-being in order to resist these institutions and maintain their agency (Lorde, 2012). Ifemelu's journey towards self-acceptance and self-love involves a number of actions and practices that align with Lorde's definition of self-care as a political act of preserving one's well-being against systemic forces. For example, Ifemelu begins to prioritise her own well-being and happiness over the expectations and judgments of others. She embraces her natural hair, starts asserting her belief and values both in her relationships and through her blog, and

takes steps to protect herself from the negative impact of systemic forces by surrounding herself with supportive people. She also reconnects with her cultural roots by eventually returning to her country Nigeria.

Community Support as Self-Care

Following the traumatic incident with hair relaxers that causes chemical burns on her scalp and hair loss, Ifemelu is confronted with the realisation that her self-esteem had been closely tied to her physical appearance. In her state of confusion and self-hatred, Ifemelu is advised by her friend Wambui to join "HappilyKinkyNappy.com", an online community for natural hair enthusiasts where she can find "inspiration" on how to manage her hair. Through this website, Ifemelu discovers a community of black women who share her experiences and challenge the restrictive beauty ideals that had previously dictated her self-worth. There she encounters women with natural hair types such as "dreadlocks, Afros, twists, braids, and curls." These women "were done with pretending that their hair was what it was not, done with running from the rain and flinching from sweat" Adichie (2013: 263). This community of natural hair enthusiasts provides a safe and welcoming environment for black women to exchange experiences and advice on caring for their natural hair. Ifemelu is grateful to have found a safe space where she can learn to nurture and embrace her natural hair without feeling the pressure to conform to societal standards that prioritise the mythical norm of straight hair.

Joining this community of black women that prioritises natural beauty over societal norms can be seen as a form of self-care and resistance for Ifemelu as it provides a supportive network, an opportunity for self-education, and a means of challenging the systemic oppression that is imposed on black women's hair. As Ifemelu learns from the experiences of other black women she becomes empowered with the tools and knowledge

she needs to care for her hair in its natural state, which is a powerful act of self-love and self-care. She meets these women at a time when she is filled with self-hatred and feels lost as an individual. However, being a part of a community that understands and validates her experiences gives her a sense of belonging and comfort, which is beneficial for her mental and emotional well-being and sets her on a path of healing and acceptance. She gradually realises that "there is nothing more beautiful than what God gave [her]", and "fell in love with her hair" (Adichie 2013: 264). This is a perfect example of how joining "HappilyKinkyNappy.com" is a form of resistance against societal beauty standards that prioritise Eurocentric beauty ideals. By choosing to grow their natural hair this "movement of black women" who have decided that "they would never put "horse hair on [their] head ever again", or use relaxers which they called "creamy crack" (Adichie 2013: 263), Ifemelu and the members of the members of this virtual community are challenging the narrow definitions of beauty that are imposed on Black women by the beauty industry, and by American society as a whole. This resistance is empowering and liberating, as it allows Ifemelu to embrace her natural beauty and authenticity on her own terms.

Blogging- Self-Care Against Institutionalised Oppression and Difference

In addition to joining a community that inspires her to self-love, Ifemelu's blog *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* serves as another crucial mode of self-care and advocacy, allowing her to express her thoughts, connect with others, and navigate the complexities of race and identity in America. As a graduate student at Princeton University, Ifemelu starts the blog, which later becomes crucial in her journey towards self-discovery and acceptance, to process her experiences as a Nigerian immigrant in America and share her insights on race and identity. Ifemelu's blog serves as a means of self-care, allowing her to delve into her

emotions concerning her hair and identity, while also challenging mainstream Western ideas of beauty and race. Ifemelu's blog posts before and after her "big chop," when she cuts off her relaxed hair, reflect different stages of her journey towards self-acceptance and cultural identity. Prior to the "big chop," which marks the start of her self-care journey, Ifemelu writes about a range of topics related to race, including cultural differences, stereotypes, and microaggressions. Her writing reflects a level of self-doubt and insecurity, particularly concerning her appearance and pressure to conform to Western beauty standards. However, after cutting her hair, the blog evolves and she shifts her focus to issues of cultural identity, self-acceptance, white privilege, and institutionalised difference in the US. She also writes about the media's perpetuation of Eurocentric beauty standards and becomes a vocal advocate for natural hair and cultural diversity, demonstrating greater confidence and assertiveness in her writing.

Ifemelu uses her blog to shed light on the implications of ignorance when it comes to discussing issues related to race. She emphasises the significance of acknowledging and embracing diversity, particularly in terms of beauty, to prevent exclusion and fight against racism. In one of her blog entries, Ifemelu talks about the beauty industry's limited representation and diversity, which favours a narrow definition of beauty that is Eurocentric, and also brings attention to how white privilege can result in ignorance regarding the challenges experienced by Black individuals. She recounts a "raw and true" personal experience with her White boyfriend, Curt, about the Eurocentric beauty standards in Western media. Curt had commented on the fact that *Essence*, a beauty magazine for black women, is "racially skewed" because it only features black women (Adichie 2013: 364). Ifemelu found this remark insensitive as most beauty magazines typically feature only or primarily white or tanned models, which is accepted as the norm. She takes this as an opportunity to explain the importance of *Essence* and other black

women-focused media channels. She expresses her frustration with the lack of makeup and beauty advice for women with darker skin or kinky hair and notes that many products labelled as "universal" are only suitable for white women:

> "Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me /…/ Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for color because all their readers are supposed to have cheeks you can pinch for color. This tells you about the different hair products for everyone – and 'everyone' means blonds, brunettes, and redheads. I am none of those. And this tells you about the best conditioners – for straight, wavy, and curly. No kinky/…/ This says that this pink lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink…" (Adichie 2013: 365)

This perspective is something Curt had not considered before given his privileged position first as a white person, and secondly, as a man. His excuse for his ignorance is that he didn't mean for his comment to be "a big deal" (Adichie 2013, 365). Curt's failure to understand the significance of the issue and the impact it has on Ifemelu's daily life, highlights his privilege and demonstrates how white privilege can blind people to the experiences and challenges faced by marginalised groups, leading to dismissive or insensitive behaviour.

In another blog post titled "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor", Ifemelu explores the relationship between hair and race, and expresses her opinion that both hair and race are social constructs that have been used to discriminate against people who do not conform to certain norms. According to Ifemelu, hair is "a perfect metaphor for race" (Adichie 2013: 367). This could be interpreted to mean that the way society perceives and values hair is similar to the way it perceives and values race. In the US, straight and silky hair is considered more desirable and attractive than coarse or kinky hair, which is associated with blackness. Similarly, whiteness has been historically privileged over other races in the US. Therefore, hair could be seen as a metaphor for race because it highlights the social and cultural biases that exist in American society. Ifemelu goes on to discuss how makeover shows often perpetuate racist views of Black hair by featuring black women with natural hair in the "before" picture, which is then straightened

for the “after” picture. This practice promotes the idea that natural black hair is “unprofessional”, “unkempt” and “just not damn normal” (Adichie 2013: 367). It contributes to making black women feel ashamed or embarrassed to wear their hair in its natural state, and puts pressure on them to use chemical hair straighteners. In contrast, white women are not subjected to the same kind of scrutiny and pressure to conform to a narrow standard of beauty. This suggests that white privilege allows white women to feel comfortable with their natural appearance, while black women are often made to feel inferior or inadequate if they do not conform to white standards of beauty.

By using her blog to teach black women to love and accept themselves as they are, Ifemelu’s blog is a powerful tool against a capitalist economy that thrives on the “institutionalised rejection of differences” (Lorde, 2012). The beauty industry, like many other industries, thrives on capitalism by creating and exploiting differences in beauty standards that exist within society. The industry profits by promoting and selling products and services that are marketed as a way to conform to these standards. With regards to black people, capitalism thrives on institutionalised difference by perpetuating Eurocentric beauty standards that prioritise and celebrate features associated with whiteness. This results in a limited representation of beauty standards in mainstream media and advertising, which in turn creates a demand for products that can help black people conform to these limited beauty standards. This is reflected in the limited availability of beauty products designed for the unique needs of black people, as well as the promotion of skin lightening products, which reinforce the idea that lighter skin is more desirable.

Through her practice of self-care and community support, Ifemelu, and by extension the black female community, gains access to spaces that would ordinarily mostly be accessed through white privilege. As her blog gains popularity and credibility, it leads to more opportunities for her, including paid speaking engagements, writing opportunities,

and a fellowship at Princeton University, which eventually motivates her to turn her passion into a profitable business, allowing her to support herself through her writing and speaking career, and to even buy herself a home. This further boosts her confidence in herself and her abilities. In her blog, she expresses her sense of pride and liberation in her decision to live by her own terms, rather than according to society's beauty ideals and writes about how this decision has positively impacted her relationship with her body and self-image. As she continues to write about beauty, race, identity, and other issues that Black people face in America, and challenges the prevailing ideas on these topics, she gains even more self-confidence.

Ifemelu's blog which caters to a large readership base and promotes a more inclusive and diverse approach to beauty than is practised in the US, reflects Audre Lorde's belief that self-care and community care are interconnected and mutually beneficial. She also stresses the importance of solidarity in fighting oppression. In addition to discussing personal insights on the racial dynamics in the US in her blog, Ifemelu also shares her hair care and self-care tips with her readers, thus creating a community that is similar to "HappilyKinkyNappy.com" in the sense that as an organic grassroots community, it forsters solidarity in the face of institutionalised and oppressive beauty. The blog serves as a platform for Black women to share their experiences, fostering self-love, acceptance, and preservation, as well as community and empowerment among its readers. In her article *Reclaiming Audre Lorde's Radical Self-Care,* Newman-Bremang (2021) emphasises the importance of community in self-care. She states that "caring for others is a form of caring for ourselves/…/we are nowhere without our village /…/, self-care is supposed to coincide with community care." This suggests that without the support of others, it is difficult to maintain a healthy self-care routine and buttresses the point on the interconnectedness of self-care and community. In other words, taking care of oneself can

also contribute to the well-being of the community, and vice versa. Ifemelu's blog exemplifies these values by being a supportive space for Black women.

Speaking Up- A Form of self-care

Just as Audre Lorde challenges the idea that there is "a homogeneity of experience" (Lorde, 2012: 116) in the lives of white and black women in the US, Ifemelu challenges those who deny the existence of racism and differences in America through her blog and personal interactions. As her self-confidence grows, another way through which Ifemelu practises self-care both through her blog and in her personal life is through having honest conversations about race and identity and educating non-Black Americans on how to have a conversation with Black Americans about race (Adichie 2013:). Just as she encourages her readers to engage in open and respectful dialogue about these issues, she challenges the mindsets of some of her acquaintances in situations where she would previously have stayed silent. In one of her paid speeches titled "How to Talk About Race with Colleagues of Other Races,", she tells the audience that "The first step to honest communication about race is to realise that you cannot equate all racisms," (Adichie 2013: 377). This seems to suggest that an important aspect of honest communication about race is the need to recognize and acknowledge that not all forms of racism are the same. The tendency to compare or rank different types of racism, such as saying that one is worse than the other, is not only inaccurate, but also counterproductive to achieving meaningful and effective discussions about race. This approach fails to recognize the unique experiences and perspectives of each group affected by racism. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nuances of different forms of racism in order to have an open and honest conversation about race, and to address the specific challenges and experiences faced by different groups affected by racism. By recognizing and acknowledging the differences in how

different groups experience racism, individuals and communities can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society. Unfortunately, Ifemelu's predominantly white audience finds her speech a tad too honest, and accuse her of racism. After the event, her hosts were "keen to discuss anything but the talk she had just given", and she received an email in all capital letters stating, "YOUR TALK WAS BALONEY. YOU ARE A RACIST. YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE LET YOU INTO THIS COUNTRY" (Adichie 2013: 377). This seems to suggest that even among people who claim to be proponents of diversity, there is a tendency to avoid having honest discussions about race. This is probably because such conversations can be uncomfortable and force them to confront their privileged status. People like this don't really care about the content of the ideas being presented. They probably attended Ifemelu's talk to feel good about themselves for simply having a diverse speaker.

Although Ifemelu feels disappointed by this incident and starts to tailor her talks to say what her audience wanted to hear. However, she does not compromise the content of her blog, which is read by a different audience, and continues to express her honest thoughts about race in private conversations also. On one such occasion, at a dinner party, Ifemelu challenges the view of a fellow dinner guest. Ifemelu and the other guests were all fervent supporters of Barack Obama, who came together to celebrate his win the day after he became the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the United States. A white man at the party makes a comment about how "Obama will end racism in [the] country," to which another guest, "a large-hipped, stylish poet from Haiti agreed", claiming she had dated a white man in California for three years and race was never an issue for them. Ifemelu speaks up and contradicts her. "That's a lie", she states categorically. Even though Ifemelu by then understands that people like the Haitian woman said what they said to keep others comfortable, and to show that they appreciate "how far we've come",

> "even though she should have left it alone, she did not. She could not. The words had, once again, overtaken her; they overpowered her throat, and tumbled out. "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." (Adichie 2013: 359)

Despite knowing that what she is saying makes her fellow guests uncomfortable, Ifemelu proceeds to share her perspective on how people often deny the role of race in their lives, especially in interracial relationships. She asserts that the reason people claim race is not an issue is because they wish it were not, even though it actually is:

> "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." (Adichie 2013:)

When Ifemelu says that she "came from a country where race was not an issue" and did not think of herself as black, she is referring to her experience growing up in Nigeria, where ethnic and cultural differences are more prominent than racial ones. Unlike in America, where people are often categorised by their skin colour and racial identity, Ifemelu did not view herself as "Black" or identify with the concept of race in Nigeria. This is because in Nigeria, people identify with their ethnicity such as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik etc. It is only after Ifemelu comes to America that she is forced to confront the realities of racial identity and discrimination, which lead to her developing a sense of her Blackness. Ifemelu further explains that as a black person in America, race is always a factor in her daily life, but it becomes more pronounced when she is in public with her white partner. However, some people, whom she calls "Zipped-Up Negroes" often avoid "talking about experiences that have to do exclusively with being Black because they want to keep everyone comfortable" (Adichie 380). Unfortunately, their fear of being labelled overly sensitive for discussing the small things that bother them in their relationships only perpetuates the problem.

Speaking up for oneself is a form of self-care. In one of her interviews where she talks about her writing, audience, and the significance of survival, Lorde emphasises the necessity of speaking the truth, even if it is difficult and uncomfortable. She says:

> "I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it and share not just my triumphs, not just the things that felt good, but the pain. The intense, often unmitigated pain. It is important to share how I know survival is survival and not just a walk through the rain." (Tate 2023)

This suggests that Lorde believes that it is important to share not only the good things in life, but also the pain and suffering that come with survival. Survival is often a difficult and arduous journey, filled with obstacles and challenges. By sharing the intense, often unmitigated pain that comes with survival, it seems that Lorde wants to emphasise the gravity of the situation and to ensure that people understand the true nature of the struggle. She wants people to recognize that survival is not just a simple walk through the rain, but a difficult journey that requires strength, courage, and resilience especially for black people who live in a world dominated by white privilege. Lorde's argument highlights the importance of speaking the truth, including sharing the pain and difficulties of one's experiences as a black person. I suggest that in the context of self-care, this means that rather than try to please people with false narratives about personal racial struggles like the Haitian dinner guest, it is important to acknowledge and validate one's own thoughts and feelings, even if they are difficult or uncomfortable to confront. By speaking the truth about one's experiences, including pain and struggles like Ifemelu does, it is possible to move towards healing and self-acceptance. Therefore, by speaking uncomfortable truths that people would rather avoid, Ifemelu is practising self-care.

Return To Nigeria- An Ultimate Act Of Self-Care

All Ifemelu's acts of self-care, from joining the virtual community of hair enthusiasts to running a blog and speaking up for herself encourage her towards the final push to return to Nigeria. The sense of alienation and lack of belonging that Ifemelu feels in the US, partially due to beauty standards and other forms of discrimination, contribute to her decision to leave the US. Even though she has established a successful business, earns substantial speaking fees, has a loving partner, and makes efforts to shield herself from the

prejudiced norms in the US, Ifemelu remains considerably dissatisfied with her life in the country. She feels as though there is:

> "cement in her soul/…/ It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness" (Adichie 2013: 12)

As a result, after living in the US for more than a decade, Ifemelu makes the choice to return to Nigeria. While this is not solely based on the beauty standards in America, and is motivated by various factors including her yearning for a sense of belonging to her Nigerian identity, it is important to acknowledge that these standards do contribute to Ifemelu's experiences of discrimination and alienation. These experiences cumulatively contribute to her overall desire to leave the US and find a more satisfying life back home in Nigeria, "...where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (Adichie 2013: 12).

Ifemelu's decision to return to Nigeria is a testament to her resilience, personal growth, and in the light of Lorde's work, an ultimate act of self-care. This is because it takes a great deal of courage and strength to uproot one's life, leave behind a successful business and established relationships, and start anew in a country with its own set of challenges and uncertainties like the ethnic bias, nepotism and epileptic power supply that Ifemelu has to contend with at some point in her return. Ifemelu initially accepts the job offer from a magazine, but later resigns due to a disagreement with the owner's editorial style. Ifemelu feels that the magazine is not authentic and only seeks to please its advertisers, rather than focusing on producing quality content that will genuinely benefit its readers. She realises that this goes against her own values and decides to leave the job. Considering that she has only been in Nigeria for a short while, and is unsure of her possibilities of getting another job, one might consider Ifemelu's actions reckless. However, her willingness to quit a job that does not align with her personal values is a

testament to the lengths that Ifemelu is willing to go to preserve her authenticity and live according to her personal set of values. She then focuses on building another blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, where she writes about various topics that she considers relevant, including her experiences of adjusting to life in Nigeria after many years away, the complexities of Nigerian society, and the challenges faced by immigrants and returnees. She also writes about race and class issues in Nigeria, particularly in relation to the beauty standards and the social and economic disparities. Additionally, she writes about her relationships, including reconnecting with her old flame Obinze and navigating her friendships and family relationships in Nigeria.

Ifemelu experiences a range of frustrating factors in Nigeria that highlight a level of dysfunction not commonly seen in the US system. These include the necessity of paying bribes to access certain privileges and the unreliable power supply, which forces her to endure heat without air conditioning unless she uses her personal generator. The constant noise and pollution from generators in the neighbourhood add to her discomfort. The sounds "pierced the soft middle of her ears and throbbed in her head" (Adichie, 478), and this could go on for weeks as the power outage sometimes lasted that long. Despite the various unpleasant issues that she has to contend with, Ifemelu is considerably happier back home in Nigeria than she was in the US. On one occasion when she receives a warm greeting from a stranger, "she ached with an almost unbearable emotion that she could not name. It was nostalgic and melancholy, a beautiful sadness for the things she had missed" (Adichie 2013: 478). She takes pleasure in simple joys like indulging in local Nigerian street food and cherishes the sense of familiarity and belonging that comes from being surrounded by her family and childhood friends after more than a decade away.

Ifemelu's willingness to step outside of her comfort zone in the US in order to pursue personal fulfilment and a stronger sense of identity demonstrates that she prioritises

her emotional and psychological well-being over material success and societal expectations. Furthermore, her relocation to Nigeria can be considered a form of resistance against oppressive standards, including the narrow and discriminatory beauty standards in the US, which make people feel insecure and ashamed of their natural appearance. By leaving the US and returning to her home country, Ifemelu is also rejecting the notion that success and fulfilment can only be achieved by conforming to Western beauty standards.

Ifemelu's journey towards self-discovery and self-acceptance and her resistance to oppressive beauty standards in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* exemplifies how selfcare as defined by Audre Lorde can be a form of can be a form of self-care resistance and self-preservation. By joining HappilyKinkyNappy.com, an online community of Black women growing their natural hair, Ifemelu finds empowerment, self-education, and self-awareness which enables her to resist the oppressive and harmful beauty standards that society has imposed on her. Furthermore, through her blog where she promotes self-love among Black women thus fostering community empowerment, Ifemelu practises self-care and teaches the readers of her blog to do too. Again, by highlighting ideas and institutions that foster racism and the oppression of black people, and by boldly defending her views through engaging in uncomfortable, but honest conversations about the dynamics of race and identity in America, Ifemelu is practising self-care in a way that reflects Audre Lorde's ideas of self are as a form of resistance and political warfare. Finally, Ifemelu's ultimate act of self-care and resistance is her return to her country Nigeria after living for more than a decade in the US. This decision is demonstrative of a significant level of personal growth, and a reflection of the lengths that Ifemelu is willing to go for her mental and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Fanon's ideas on internalised racism hold significant relevance in analysing the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Adichie's *Americanah* and within the larger postcolonial context of the novel. The theme of internalised racism and its effects on Black identity occupies a central position in *Americanah* and is intricately connected to the novel's exploration of Eurocentric beauty standards. However, while Fanon's postcolonial theory is useful in understanding colonialism and postcolonialism, it fails to acknowledge the diverse forms of oppression that Black women encounter, and the distinctive challenges they experience. Hence, this thesis also employed Lorde's thoughts in Black feminist theory, which concentrate on the lived experiences of Black women, and which is imperative to understanding the experiences of Black women concerning these issues. Having analysed *Americanah* through Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory, this thesis concludes that the imposition of Eurocentric beauty standards on the Black female characters in *Americanah* is a form of oppression with significant physical and psychological health consequences of internalised racism, inferiority complex and self-hatred. My study also concludes that the actions of the novel's protagonist in resistance to these standards can be described as self-care as proposed by Audre Lorde, and serve as evidence that self-care indeed can serve as a tool of resistance against institutionalised oppression.

Adichie's novel shows that the pressure to conform to white ideals of beauty and professionalism is deeply ingrained in US society, perpetuating a racialized hierarchy where Caucasian features are valued and considered superior. Even highly educated and accomplished black women feel the need to compromise their true selves to meet societal expectations. The unfamiliarity and lack of acceptance of natural black hair outside the

black community further compounds the pressure to conform to these oppressive standards.Lorde refers to these societal expectations and standards that are often imposed on people in America, as the "mythical norm. People who do not conform to this norm may be subject to discrimination, exclusion, or other forms of oppression. In *Americanah*, the black female characters like Ifemelu and Aunty Uju are subjected to the mythical norm of straight hair. They are subjected to white beauty standards, and discriminated against for not meeting society's expectations, particularly with regards to their hair and skin. Since a black woman's value in the US society and prospects of success are inversely correlated with how closely her characteristics resemble the white concept of beauty, many black women feel pressured to adopt unhealthy beauty practices in order to conform to the mythical norm that is perpetuated by Eurocentric beauty standards. This includes attempting to achieve a skin tone and hair texture that is similar to that of white women with bleaching creams and chemical hair relaxers. The process of using chemical hair relaxers to straighten hair is not only damaging to the hair and scalp but also poses psychological risks.

The concept of straightening one's hair, using wigs and hair extensions that resemble a white woman's hair is a contentious issue, with some viewing it as a personal choice while others see it as evidence of self-hatred and a desire to emulate whiteness. Some black women choose to indulge in these practices for convenience, as straight hair is generally easier to manage than textured Black hair. However, for black women, especially black women in the US like Ifemelu, and Aunty Uju who are forced to "adopt the manners of their oppressor" (Lorde, 2012) in order to fit in and meet professional expectations, the pressure to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards has profound psychological effects of internalised racism as proposed by Fanon. Aunty Uju's compliance with oppressive beauty standards goes beyond assimilation; her willingness to conform to these standards without

any form of resistance reflects a deeper impact on her self-perception and mental well-being, leading her to view herself as inferior to white people and her natural black hair as unattractive. However, even Ifemelu who is reluctant to straighten her hair and who at first feels as though she has lost her authenticity when she straightens is affected by these beauty ideals and internalises the oppressive views of America on black hair and beauty. She hates her hair and herself when she reverts to wearing it in its natural state, perceiving herself as having less value due to her appearance. Having analysed these examples, I have concluded that the imposition of eurocentric beauty standards on black women like Ifemelu who feel compelled to adhere to these oppressive standards leads to internalised racism, feelings of inferiority and self hatred.

Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* showcases how the institutionalised oppression in American society impacts Black women's identity, self-image, and self-worth. However, after her unpleasant experience with hair relaxer which results in a burnt scalp and hair loss leads her to question the beauty standards she has internalised and examine how they have shaped her perception of herself, she starts to take a series of actions in resistance to the notion that Black hair should conform to white standards. I have suggested that these actions which set Ifemelu on a path of self-acceptance and self-love can be defined as self-care as proposed by Audre Lorde. Lorde's argument revolves around the idea that self-care is a vital tool for marginalised individuals to navigate oppressive systems.

Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* involves prioritising her own happiness and disregarding societal expectations. She embraces her natural hair, asserts her beliefs through her relationships and blog, and surrounds herself with supportive individuals. Joining the "HappilyKinkyNappy.com" online community allows her to resist societal oppression, find support, and challenge beauty standards. Her blog serves as a crucial

mode of self-care and advocacy, promoting self-love, addressing race and identity issues, and confronting the propagation of Eurocentric beauty standards. Through her blog and personal interactions, Ifemelu challenges denial of racism and emphasises the importance of honest conversations about race, aligning with Audre Lorde's belief in sharing the difficulties of survival.

Ifemelu's ultimate act of self-care is her decision to return to Nigeria. This decision is prompted by the fact that despite her success and efforts to shield herself from prejudice, she still feels a sense of alienation and lack of belonging in the US. She remains dissatisfied with her life in the US and experiences a longing for home. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria is a testament to her resilience, personal growth, and prioritisation of her emotional and psychological well-being as it involves sacrificing a life she has built in the US over a period of thirteen years. It is a form of resistance against oppressive beauty standards and a rejection of the notion that fulfilment can only be achieved by conforming to Western ideals. Although she struggles with issues like ethnic bias, nepotism and epileptic power supply that cause her a lot of frustration and discomfort, Ifemelu finds a sense of familiarity and belonging that was missing in her life in the US. Back in Nigeria, surrounded by her family and childhood friends, she is considerably happier than she was in the US.

The analysis of Adichie's *Americanah* from a postcolonial and Black feminist perspective has shown that the concepts proposed by Frantz Fanon and Audre Lorde can be applied to literary analysis as they help to elucidate the effect of and response to oppressive Eurocentric beauty standards on Black women in a postcolonial context. The relevance and significance of this thesis work lie in its examination of the impact of Eurocentric beauty standards in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*. By

focusing on the characters' experiences with hair and beauty, this thesis sheds light on broader societal issues related to racism and colonial legacies. The analysis through the lens of postcolonial theory, particularly drawing from Frantz Fanon's ideas, provides a deeper understanding of the power dynamics at play.

The thesis argued that the imposition of Eurocentric beauty standards on Black individuals represents a form of oppression, with profound health and psychological consequences resulting from internalised hatred. This insight holds wider implications for society, as it highlights the detrimental effects of societal norms and the urgent need for more inclusive and diverse beauty standards. By exploring these themes, the thesis contributes to ongoing conversations about representation, identity, and equality. Furthermore, the study examined the characters' resistance to oppressive beauty ideals by utilising the concept of self-care within Black feminist theory, as advocated by Audre Lorde. This analysis underscores the empowering potential of self-care as a form of resistance and self-preservation. It emphasises the importance of challenging dominant beauty narratives and fostering self-acceptance within marginalised communities. In terms of impact, this thesis work contributes to existing scholarship on literature, postcolonial theory, and feminist studies. It encourages a critical reevaluation of beauty standards and their implications for marginalised groups. By highlighting the multifaceted nature of racism and its presence in seemingly trivial aspects of culture, such as beauty standards, the thesis promotes a more nuanced understanding of systemic oppression. The findings of this thesis can inform discussions and initiatives related to diversity, representation, and the deconstruction of Eurocentric beauty norms. By raising awareness of the harmful consequences of these standards, the work advocates for societal change and challenges readers to question and reshape their own perceptions of beauty.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Ezinne Chidi Obiagazie-Ibezim

Euroopa-kesksete ilustandardite mõju Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "Americanah" romaanis.

The Impact Of Eurocentric Beauty Standards In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah.*

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94 lk

Siinne lõputöö uurib Euroopa-kesksete ehk eurotsentriliste ilustandardite mõju Nigeeria kirjaniku Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 2013. aasta romaani "Americanah" tegelastele. Antud romaan käsitleb juukseid kui näidet, mille läbi uurida keerukamaid ühiskondlikke probleeme nii Ameerika Ühendriikides kui ka Nigeerias. Läbi tähelepanu juustele, näitab Adichie kuidas rassism mõjutab isegi selliseid Ameerika kultuuri näiliselt tähtsuseid aspekte, nagu ilupraktikad- ning standardid. Käesolev töö analüüsib Adichie romaani läbi postkoloniaalse teooria, keskendudes Frantz Fanoni ideedele. See väitekiri väidab, et mustanahalistele inimestele kehtestatud eurotsentrilised ilustandardid on rõhuvad ja põhjustavad laiaulatuslikke vaimse ja füüsilise tervisega seonduvaid tagajärgi. Lisaks uurib töö, kuidas teatud enese eest hoolitsemise rutiinid aitavad Americanahi tegelastel eurotsentrilistele rõhuvatele iluideaalidele vastu hakata. Et seda uurida, kasutab töö mustanahalist feministliku teooriat, mille pakkus välja Audre Lorde. Seda tehes püüab käesolev uuring anda panuse käimasolevasse aruteludesse eurotsentriliste ilustandardite

mõju kohta mustanahalistele ja laiendada meie arusaama viisidest, kuidas kirjandus võib seda teemat avardada.

Lõputöö koosneb sissejuhatusest, kahest põhipeatükist ja kokkuvõttest. Sissejuhatuses antakse põgus ülevaade romaanist, eurotsentriliste ilustandardite kontseptsioonist, ning Aafrika-Ameerika ja Nigeeria ilupraktikatest ja neid kujundanud teguritest.

Teoreetiline peatükk keskendub Frantz Fanoni mõtetele internaliseeritud rassismist, kaksikteadvusest ja dekoloniseerimisest. Samuti keskendub antud peatükk Audre Lorde kontseptsioonidele müütilisest normist, institutsionaliseeritud erinevusest, ja eneseabist. Need teooriad loovad raamistiku järgmistes peatükkides toimuvaks empiiriliseks analüüsiks.

2. peatükis analüüsitakse Adichie romaani eelnimetatud teooriatega, uurides eurotsentriliste ilustandardite mõju mustanahalistele tegelastele, eriti peategelasele. See peatükk uurib, kuidas need tegelased, kes elavad ühiskonnas, kus järgitakse müütilist normi, võtavad omaks rassismi ja rõhumise, mille tulemuseks on eneseviha ja alaväärsustunne. Selles peatükis uuritakse ka peategelase vastupanu rõhuvatele ilustandarditele, vaadates neid läbi Audre Lorde eneseabi kontseptsiooni.

Uuringu tulemused on esitatud kokkuvõttes. Olles analüüsinud “Americanah” romaani Frantz Fanoni postkoloniaalse teooria kaudu, jõutakse selles väitekirjas järeldusele, et eurotsentriliste ilustandardite pealesurumine “Americanah” teose mustanahalistele naistegelastele on rõhumise vorm, millel on olulised psühholoogilised ja füüsilised tervisemõjud – internaliseeritud rassism, alaväärsuskompleks ja enesevihkamine. Oma uurimuses jõuan ka järeldusele, et romaani peategelase vastupanu eurotsentrilistele ilustandarditele võib kirjeldada kui enesehooldust, nagu pakkus välja

Audre Lorde, ja see on tõend selle kohta, et enesehooldus võib tõepoolest olla institutsionaliseeritud rõhumise vastu võitlemise vahend.

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina, Ezinne Chidi Obiagazie-Ibezim, annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) minu loodud teose The Impact Of Eurocentric Beauty Standards In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah.* mille juhendaja on Dr. Eret Talviste reprodutseerimiseks eesmärgiga seda säilitada, sealhulgas lisada digitaalarhiivi DSpace kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse lõppemiseni.

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