

## Lacan's perspective on American Dream in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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### Abstract

American Dream is a fascinating idea that has set scores of pilgrims in search of a new world. In the contemporary world, the idea has continued to inspire generations of immigrants to America in search of greener pasture. This paper interrogates the idea of American Dream using Jacques Lacan's concept of the imaginary order as a conceptual tool. It is the contention of this paper that American Dream is not something realisable. The experience of some of the characters who travelled to America in search of American Dream shows that there is nothing like American Dream, where the streets of New York are littered with dollars. Therefore, the study concludes that American Dream is a game which the imaginary order plays on human consciousness.

**Key words:** *Americanah*, American Dream, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Lacan's imaginary order, illusion

### Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist whose works have received a lot of critical discussions both in Africa and Western media. Her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) was awarded the Commonwealth Prize for the Best First Book; her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* won the Orange BroadBand prize for fiction in 2007, and her third novel *Americanah* published in 2013 has won numerous awards: winner of the 2013 National Book Critics Circle award for fiction, the New York Times' Ten Best Books of the year and winner of the Chicago Tribune 2013 Heartland Prize for fiction. In terms of literary reviews and criticism, her recent novel *Americanah* has received a lot of critical discussions from the literary community.

In an article entitled "Race-in-America is a Central Character in America", Subashini Navaratan(2013) explores the impact of cross boarder migration and how it transforms the life of the characters especially Ifemelu and Obinze. In another review, Tyrone Beason's(2013) "*Americanah*: Africans struggle to Become Americanah" gives a clear description of what African immigrants suffer in foreign countries especially in America. In Margaret Koskei's(2014) essay "Representation of Female African Immigration Experience in the West: A Case Study of Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*" examines a number of issues using feminist approach to discuss racism and its effect on African female immigrants. In her work, she compares the experience of male and female African immigrants and concludes that female immigrants adapt better than male immigrants in foreign countries. Wabende Nabututu (2014) in her seminal studies "A Stylistic Approach to Chimamanda Adichie's work: A Study of *Americanah*" studies the novel from a stylistic perspective. There she contends "that Adichie's uniqueness is seen through the use of different aspects of style like extensive use of translated and untranslated Igbo" (p.5).

In view of this state of scholarship of Adichie's *Americanah*, one discovers that the novel has been studied from different critical perspectives such as problems associated with cross-border migration, racism, representation of female African immigrant experience and stylistic approach. It is also noted that this novel has not been studied from Jacques Lacan's theoretical perspective. Therefore, the main thrust of this paper to fill up the gap in scholarship by interrogating the idea of American Dream using Lacan's imaginary order.

### Lacan's imaginary order

The imaginary order is one of the three phases of human development enunciated by Jacques Lacan. The imaginary order is known as the mirror stage which takes place in children between six months and eighteen months of age. During this phase of development, the child has not mastered itself. Using the illustration of a mirror, the child sees himself in front of a mirror and identifies with the object in front of him. This is the reason why Lacan calls this phase of child development the mirror stage. In his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"(2001), Lacan describes the mirror-image concept as follows: "We have

only to understand the mirror stage as an identification in the full sense that analysis gives to them: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image –whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*” (p. 1286).

In view of this quotation, the child according to Lacan cannot distinguish between itself and the Other. This misperception leads to fantasy or illusion. The perfect object the child sees on the mirror creates what psychoanalysts call the ideal ego, a perfect self which has no insufficiency. In other words, the child builds a sense of identity by misidentifying with the ideal ego, which is a fantasy of the self. What the child fails to recognise at this stage of mirror image is that the image leads to fantasy. The beautiful image on the mirror, though outside the child, is constitutive of the child’s imagination. In line with Lacan’s theorisation on the mirror image, one may strongly argue that American Dream is a symbol of the ever-evolving nature of man’s desire for a better life; which like the imaginary image exists within man’s imaginary consciousness. It is pertinent to note that the mirror stage of childhood development goes beyond the age limit stipulated by Jacques Lacan; it is something that man experiences all through his life, the imaginative faculty to dream of a better future in his reveries and daydreams. Herbert Marcuse(1987) in *Eros and Civilisation* argues that the imaginative faculty which is associated with the imaginary order constitutes a fundamental aspect of human psyche. Fantasy he posits links the deepest layer of the unconscious. Thus we read: “Fantasy plays a most decisive function in the deepest mental structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality; it preserves the archetypes of the genus, the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory, the tabooed images of freedom” (pp.140-141).

These tabooed images of freedom according to Marcuse are deeply rooted in human psyche that its mode of operation transgresses the conscious awareness of man. According to Eric Neumann,(2014) these imaginary thoughts of fantasy are means through which man tries to connect with primordial unity, an essential unity of life. For Neumann, “they have their place not only in art and religion, but is the living processes of the individual psyche, in dreams and in fantasies” (p. 11). On this account of Neumann, the imaginary order expresses its fantasy through works of art, religion and dreams. In the recorded history of mankind, there are various means through which the imaginary order is represented. In the Judeo-Christian ethos, we have the Chilastic metaphor of the millenarianism, of the new earth and the new heaven where the just will reign with Christ. In political economy, this idea of collective fantasy is underscored by Karl Marx in his political manifesto of classless structure of society. This notion of Karl Marx is elucidated by Eliade(1960): “Whatever we may think of the scientific claims of Marx, it is clear that the author of the Communist Manifesto takes up and carries on one of the great eschatological myths of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean world, namely: the redemptive part to be played by the just(the elect, the anointed, the innocent, the missionaries, in our own days by the proletariat), whose sufferings are invoked to change the ontological status of the world. In fact, Marx’s classless society, and the consequent disappearance of all historical tensions, finds their most exact precedent in the myth of the Golden Age which according to a number of traditions, lie at the beginning and the end of History” (pp. 25-26).

It is critical to mention that Karl Marx’s writing on the labour relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is closely affected by the imaginary order whereby Marx projects a classless society where the economic wealth of the nation will be equitably distributed. However, it will be of great interest to mention some of the ways Lacan’s imaginary order has manifested itself in recent times especially in historical movements like militant feminism, African –Uhuru nationalism, Orwellian Big Brotherism, Mircea Eliade’s myth of eternal return. These are various forms in which man has wished for a better future for himself.

In this paper, the form in which the collective dream of mankind is represented is in form of American Dream. This category belongs to what Warren Wager (1982) calls terminal literature, “a creative act of secular imagination” (p. 5) which is future-oriented. According to Ikenna Dieke (1993), terminal literature “views the end as an opportunity for passage to a radically new world, most often to a better one” (p. 285).

### **Theoretical perspective on American Dream**

The quest for a new world is constellated on the idea of American Dream. American Dream is an idea that is discussed by Adams (1831) in *The Epic of America* as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (p.415). This line of thought forms the basic idea of American Dream as a land of freedom, equal opportunity and economic enterprise. Historically, the idea of American Dream is closely associated with the early English Puritans. In 1630, the idea of American Dream is the motive that drives the Puritans, a religious sect of the Anglican Church in England to seek for a new world, America. The Puritans disagree with the Anglican Church in terms of doctrine and religious practice. For the Puritans, the religious reformation in England did not bring the desired reform. To the Puritans, there were still elements of Catholic practice in Anglican Church. These groups of Puritans called for more reform; and as such,

were persecuted by the Anglican Church. Therefore, for these Puritans to attain the religious freedom which they desired, they embarked on a journey to the new world, America, which is described as a land of freedom and new life. This desire and aspiration of the Puritans is summarized by Captain Edward (1654) as follows: "Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes! All you people of Christ that are here oppressed, imprisoned and scurrilously derided, gather yourself together, your wives(sic) and little ones, and answer to your several names as you shall be shipped for His service in the Western world, and more especially for the United Colonies of new England. Know this is the place where the Lord will create new Heaven, and a new Earth in new churches, and a new Commonwealth together" (p. 2).

For the early Puritans, America holds the dream of a new earth and a new Heaven, which is a fulfilment of Biblical promise. However, in 1776, the idea of American Dream forms the bedrock of American constitution. Jefferson (1998) declares that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of Happiness" (p. 52). Jefferson's declaration is similar to the Puritan's conception of America as a land of freedom where every person is free to pursue his dream. For James Adam (1931), the American Dream presupposes social mobility where life will be richer and better for everyone "regardless of the circumstances of birth or position" (p. 404). In politics, the idea of American Dream is frequently used by politicians to canvass for votes. President Barrack Obama (2006) in *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* links the idea of American Dream with freedom, self-reliance and personal responsibility. On the other hand, American Dream is an idea that is effectively used by the civil activist, Rev Martin Luther King Jr. (1992) to address racial problem in America. This is evident in the famous declaration, 'I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood....'(p. 104). King's speech presupposes a new American society founded on American Dream where racism will be a thing of the past.

In view of this analysis, one can say that American Dream from the Puritans to the contemporary time resonates with a sense of freedom, equal opportunity, universal brotherhood of man irrespective of your race, or creed. In this paper we intend to interrogate the conceptual frame of American Dream whether it is a dream that is obtainable or just a fantasy of the imaginary order which exists in human consciousness. This presupposition will guide our interaction with the primary text.

### **Illusion of American Dream**

With reference to Adichie's *Americanah*, Lacan's critic Slovoj Zizek(1991) maintains that "the relation of the subject to the object experienced by everyone of us in a dream: the subject faster than the object, gets closer and closer to it and yet can never attain it" (p. 4). This is exactly what is experienced by some of the characters in the novel who have long nurtured the American Dream as the "land filled with milk and honey, where every dream and aspiration of the Nigerian immigrant and /or potential immigrant be realised" (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 2010, p. 251). On getting to America some of these characters discover that America is not as peaceful and stress free as they had imagined; rather, they discovered that American Dream 'is fantasy, in which the ego experiments with its own future. Here we may do a variety of things: imagine an ideal counterpart, or a divine figure of authority, or a utopia of fulfilled wishes (p. 20).

The first surprise which Ifemelu, the main character in the novel experiences on arrival in America is heat wave. Over there in Nigeria, she thinks that Europe, especially America, is "a cold place of wool coats and snow" (p. 103). On arrival in America she experienced 'an uncompassionate heat' (p. 104) that shattered her dream of America as a cool country. As the narrator puts it, she is dazed by "the sweltering heat" (p. 103), which she exclaims, "I did not know it would be so hot here" (p.104). Ifemelu's American Dream is not shattered by the harsh weather alone but also by "Aunty Uju's old Toyota hatch, with a patch of rust on its sides and peeling fabric on the seats" (p. 104).

On the road to Aunty Uju's residence, along the highway Ifemelu noticed a teenage boy in a baseball cap with two hands on his legs urinating on a brick wall. This phenomenon struck her that she called the attention of Aunty Uju.

"See that boy!" She said. "I didn't know people do things like this in America.

"You didn't know people pee in America?" Aunty Uju asked, barely glancing at the boy before turning back to a traffic light. "Ahn-ahn, Aunty! I mean that they do it outside. Like that?

"They don't. It's not like back home where everybody does it" (p. 104).

In this strange conversation between Aunty Uju and Ifemelu, one issue that is at stake is their different habits of thought. Aunty Uju has stayed long in America; therefore such act is not surprising to her. On the other hand is Ifemelu's habit of thought controlled by the American Dream. She never thought that people can urinate outside the toilet in America. For her, such act of indiscipline is common in Nigeria not in America.

Also, if emelu's first night in America provokes a strange sense of newness, whether she is actually in America of her dream or elsewhere. When it is time for them to sleep, Aunty Uju and her son, Dike climb onto the bed while "Ifemelu settled on a blanket on the floor" (p. 106). This situation on her first day in America challenges her idea of

American Dream. Even Aunt Uju's son, Dike is surprised that Ifemelu has to sleep on the floor. Dike asks, "How come she has to sleep on the floor, mom? We can all fit in'asthough he could sense how Ifemelu felt'" (p. 108). Aunt Uju quickly puts up an argument to justify herself that in the village when Ifemelu visits their grandmother, she sleeps on the floor. Aunt Uju forgets one thing that this is America, God's own country, and not their village in Nigeria.

When Aunt Uju informs Ifemelu that she will come over to study in America, she is excited and begins to dream of America. "She saw herself in a house from The Cosby Show, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease" (p. 99). When Ifemelu is settled in America she discovers that the streets are "poorly lit, bordered not by leafy trees but by closely parked cars, nothing like the pretty streets on The Cosby Show" (p. 106). This sense of illusion that American Dream is not what she thought provoked what the narrator describes as a sense of disappointment that "she stood there for a long time, her body unsure of itself, overwhelmed by a sense of newness" (p. 106). As a matter of fact, she is still in search of American Dream that will correspond to what she has in mind. This may to some extent account for her sense of "fission of expectation, an eagerness to discover America" (p. 106).

Besides, one of the things that surprised Ifemelu is that people can cheat in America especially white Americans. This fact comes up in Kimberly's house; where she wanted to give Ifemelu her old car to use. It is from there that the issue of drivers licence started. Ifemelu narrates how she obtained an American driver's license. In what she describes as a dark basement room, their instructor, white American collected money from all of them before showing them a safe driving film projected on the wall. Ifemelu notices that the instructor is not showing them the correct film. She doubts how a car that is moving slowly can have an accident that will break the driver's neck. After the written examination which Ifemelu finds easy, the instructor collected their papers and uses eraser to clean the wrong answers and shades in the correct ones. At the end of the exercise, all of them pass and are issued with American drivers licence. This incident provoked an intense discussion between Ifemelu and Laura: "It was a strange moment for me, because until then I thought nobody in America cheats," Ifemelu said. Kimberly said, "Oh my goodness". This happened in Brooklyn?" Laura asked. "Yes" Laura shrugged, as though to say it would, of course, happen in Brooklyn but not in the America in which she lived" (p.104).

Laura forgets one thing; Brooklyn is in America and not the other way round. She finds it difficult to accept that Americans can cheat. Actually, Ifemelu is telling her the story not to goad Laura, but to express her shock of what she conceives of American Dream, a perfect place, of perfect people unlike Nigeria where she comes from. A similar story is narrated by Ifemelu who discovers from an American television that there are armed robbers in America. Ifemelu thinks armed robbery happens only in Nigeria, but Aunt Uju tells her that such criminal activities go on daily in America; unlike Nigeria, they keep record of criminal activities.

Another problem that shattered Ifemelu's sense of American Dream is the issue of getting a job in America. One of the major reasons for mass migration of Nigerians to America is to avoid joblessness. Most of the Nigerian medical doctors that graduated in Nigeria travel to America or Britain to take their professional medical examinations, which will qualify them to practice in America or Britain. The reason for this massive migration is what the narrator summarises as "a move to run away from parched wasteland of joblessness" (p. 40), which is symbolically represented by Nigeria, "a country starved of hopes (p.40). Obinze, experiences this state of joblessness, a graduate from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with second class upper division applies for jobs respectively at Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja. Even when he performed well during the job interviews, the job opportunities were is given to less qualified candidates.

In an interesting conversation between Ifemelu and her father, the issue of getting employment forms the central point of their conversation. Ifemelu's father wanted to know her prospect of getting employed after her graduation. To her father's surprise, Ifemelu says that the school has assigned to her a career counsellor. This answer gladdens the heart of her father who says, "I have no doubt that you will excel. America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them" (p. 205). What Ifemelu's father emphasises on is the American Dream where people have equal opportunities to aspire, and to pursue any economic enterprise of their choice irrespective of their background. But from Ifemelu's experience, American Dream is hard to explain.

On arrival in America, Ifemelu is surprised to notice that she cannot work with her student visa; besides, she has to change her identity to Ngozi Okonkwo. Gradually, she discovers that it is not easy to get a job in America. She attempts several job interviews such as waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, babysitter, gas station attendant and home health aide. Wambui has to tell everyone that Ifemelu is looking for a job. Ifemelu has to type and retype her resume claiming past waitress experience in Lagos, where she claims she has worked as a babysitter for Ginika. In spite of all these efforts, the job is not forthcoming. Coupled with this job problem are "bills on her table" (p.144), pressure to pay her house rent and to complete the remaining part of her tuition bill; Ifemelu has to respond to the City Paper advert that requires "female personal assistant for busy sports coach in Ardmore, communication and interpersonal skills required"(p. 143).

According to the Table Tennis Coach, there are two positions, one for office job, which is already taken; and the other one which is help to relax is vacant. What actually is involved in the second position is sexual relationship in exchange for dollars. It needs to be emphasised that what happens between the table tennis coach and Ifemelu is very complex; sometimes it may be likened to incidents described by Joseph Fletcher (1966) in *Situation Ethics*. However, she takes the option of having sex with the table tennis coach against her wish. Even though she did not want it, she succumbed to it. What the table tennis coach did is rape. Like every act of sexual violation, it leaves its marks of physical and psychological trauma on Ifemelu. The pertinent issue is not necessarily the sexual relationship between the tennis coach and Ifemelu but the damage done to her within the context of American Dream. First, we notice the psychological trauma inflicted on her as a result of this unequal exchange of sex. On her way back in the train, "her mind is choked with mud...she began to cry" (p. 154). Back in her apartment, we see another dimension to her trauma, 'she washed her hands with water, so hot that it scaled her fingers' (p. 154). This is not just an ordinary act of washing her hands with hot water but a symbolic act of erasing or washing off the guilt in her soul. Unfortunately, the hot water will not soften the stings in her soul. Furthermore, "she took off her clothes and squashed them at a corner, staring at it for a while. She would never again wear those clothes, never even touch them" (p. 154). The clothes symbolically bring to her memory how her world was invaded by the tennis coach. On the table that is beside her bed is the hundred dollar bill given to her by the tennis coach. This dollar bill provokes a rising loathing of her body. Whenever she wants to shower, she cannot bear the thought of touching her body. As a result of this violation of her human dignity, the narrator tells us that "she imagined packing her things, somehow buying a ticket and going back to Lagos" (p. 154). Unfortunately, this event runs contrary to her father's assertion that 'America is an organised place, and job opportunities are rife there' (p. 201).

On the other hand, if American Dream presupposes equal job opportunity based on merit, the case of Ifemelu is questionable. In her discussion with her father, she did not tell her parents how she got the job. Her father says, "I have no doubt that you will excel. America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them" (p. 295). Ifemelu is reluctant to tell her father that the public relations job she got in Baltimore is through the help of Curt who says, "I know some people my dad did business with, they might be able to help" (p. 202). Ifemelu gets the job not on merit but through Curt's father's connection. In Nigeria, this is exactly the kind of problem that Obinze had. He attends different job interviews at Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja. He does well at the interviews yet the least qualified candidate is employed.

Apart from the problem of securing a job, Ifemelu and other characters like Auntie Uju are faced with the problem of racial discrimination which runs contrary to their expectation of American Dream, that on no account will any citizen be discriminated on the account of sex, colour of the skin and nationality. In several instances in the novel, there are enough evidence to substantiate the various forms of racial discrimination suffered by Ifemelu and Auntie Uju. First in terms of racial relationship between a black woman and a white American, Ifemelu observes that "when you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters" (p. 369). In the relationship between Ifemelu and Curt, there exists a racial dimension to their relationship. Each time Curt goes out with Ifemelu or introduces her to his friends, Ifemelu notices a remarkable degree of discriminatory attitude towards her. For instance, at a cocktail reception, Ashleigh's friends from high school and room-mates in college come to greet Curt. When Curt introduced Ifemelu as his girlfriend, they look at her with surprise, a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and their expression is the question "why her?" (p. 292). The problem with Ashleigh's friends is not that Curt has a girlfriend, but why must she be a black woman. To Curt's friends, it is a "great tribal loss" (p. 292) considering that Curt is too handsome to befriend a black woman. On another occasion, when Curt and Ifemelu walk into a restaurant with linen-covered tables, the host asked Curt "table for one?" (p. 294). The irony of this situation is that the host is aware that Curt came into the restaurant with somebody, but he deliberately fails to acknowledge the second person with Curt, Ifemelu, a black woman. For the host, the second person with Curt is consigned to non-existence. Before Ashleigh's wedding, Curt drops Ifemelu off at a small fashionable resort near his childhood home, to get her eyebrows shaped.

As Ifemelu steps into the saloon she says: "Hi. I'd like to get my eyebrows waxed." "We don't do curly," the woman said. "You don't do curly?" "No. Sorry" (p. 292). In this short conversation between the owner of the saloon and Ifemelu, the issue at stake is not money but racial segregation. Interestingly, when Curt intervenes, the scenario changed into something else. We see the owner of the saloon transformed into a smiling solicitous coquette. "I'm sorry it was a misunderstanding," she said. "Yes, they could do the eyebrows" (p.292). Truthfully, there is nothing like a misunderstanding between them. For the owner of the saloon to say it is a misunderstanding is a cover-up. Even among the white American children, we notice elements of racial discrimination against Ifemelu. In the house where Ifemelu works as a babysitter, she takes care of Morgan and Taylor. But when their father announces that their uncle Curt is dating their babysitter, Ifemelu, Morgan and Taylor show their racist instinct. "Ifemelu is your

girlfriend?" Morgan asked. "Yes," Curt said. "That is disgusting," Morgan said, looking genuinely disgusted. "Morgan!" Kimberly said. Morgan turned and stalked off upstairs (p.194). When Taylor asks Curt if he is getting married to Ifemelu, he answers yes. Taylor as the narrator puts it as "slightly dampened" (p.194). Don, the father of Taylor and Morgan share the same racist attitude towards Curt's relationship with Ifemelu. To Don, "it did not occur to him to think of both of them, together, entangled in the delicate thread of romance" (p. 195).

Finally on Ifemelu, we observe a remarkable degree of covert racism in her encounter with the carpet cleaner. Kimberly and her husband, Don are hosting a cocktail party to raise fund for their friend who is contesting for the Congress. Part of the preparation for this fund drive is cleaning of the house. When the doorbell rings, it is the carpet cleaner. According to the narrator, "he stiffened when he saw her. First is that surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility" (p. 166). The cleaner is surprised to see a black woman and possibly the owner of "grand house with white pillars" (p. 166). Immediately Ifemelu indicated her position as a babysitter, "it was like a conjuror's trick, the swift disappearance of his hostility. His face sank into a grin...The universe was once again arranged as it should be" (p.166). The universe being properly arranged means that a black woman cannot be the owner of "grand house white pillars" (p. 160). So far as he is concerned, the house does not suit her because she is a black woman.

Like Ifemelu, Aunt Uju has her own bitter experience of racism. After several attempts on American Medical examination, she passes the examination. With this she can practice as a medical doctor in America. In order for her to fit into the mainstream of the American society, she has to change her African identity. The narrator of the text captures this subtle politics of racism in a dialogue between Aunt Uju and Ifemelu: "Later, she said, 'I have to take my braids out for my interviews and then 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. "So there are no doctors with braids in America?" Ifemelu asked. "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"(p. 119).

Even though it is not explicitly mentioned in this conversation between Aunt Uju and Ifemelu, what is at stake is racial segregation. For Ifemelu she cannot understand why Aunt Uju has removed her braided hair (African hair style). Probably, as a new comer to America, Ifemelu is yet to understand the politics of racism in America. Kemi and Aunt Uju who have stayed longer in America know that Aunt Uju may lose the job opportunity on account of her African hair style. Furthermore, in the hospital where she works, Aunt Uju walks into the consulting room and a white patient asks her, "Is the doctor coming?" and when she says she is the doctor, the patient's face changed to fire clay (p. 182). That afternoon, the patient had his file transferred to another doctor.

Dike, Aunt Uju's son has his fair share of racism. In school Dike is found in a closet with a white girl showing each other their private parts. Only Dike, a black child is singled out for punishment. There was no mention of the white girl found with him in the closet. When the school computer system is hacked, the principal blames Dike for it. The irony of the situation is that on the day the school computer is hacked, Dike and his mother visited uncle Ozavisa at Hartford. Besides, Dike does not have knowledge of computer system. When Aunt Uju asks why her son must be the first suspect, she learns that in such cases, "you have to blame the black kids first" (p. 349). As a result of this incident, Dike attempts suicide. But unfortunately, some characters living in Nigeria like Ranyinudo simply cannot understand why Dike would want to kill himself in America, which in her opinion to be a place flowing with milk and honey. In fact, she makes the following declaration: "I don't understand how a fine boy like Dike would want to kill himself. A boy living in America with everything. How can?" (p. 425). What Ranyinudo seemed unable to understand this because she lives in Nigeria and does not know the depth of the pains of racism; she has simply not experienced it and can hardly know it. In frustration and disillusionment, Aunt Uju has to ask herself: "Is this what I came to America for?" (p. 141). We can feel the grand illusion experienced by Aunt Uju and her son, Dike, who thought that by coming to America life will be better for them. Unfortunately, it is the opposite.

### Conclusion

The experience of some of the characters, especially Aunt Uju, her son, Dike and Ifemelu show that American Dream is an illusion of the mind. Towards the end of the story, Ifemelu gives us an apt description of what American Dream is. "The best thing about America is that it gives you space. I like that. I like that you buy into the dream, it is a lie but you buy into it and that is all that matters" (p. 434). American Dream from the experience of these characters that went to America in search of American Dream is nothing but a dream. In view of this analysis, one may agree with Lacan's theory of the imaginary order that American Dream is a novel which the imaginary order plays on human consciousness; its mode of existence remains a fantasy.

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