



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***DISPLACEMENT, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND NIGRESCENCE IN
SELECTED CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVELS***

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**DISPLACEMENT, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND NIGRESCENCE IN SELECTED
CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVELS**

By

AYAICHA SOMIA

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2021

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DEDICATION

To my Parents,



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2021

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The bruised voices of the African immigrants in America have been portrayed in contemporary African literature from a more authentic perspective. The depiction of the contemporary African diaspora played a major role at destructing the single story and the stereotypes that the Westerners have built against Africans. Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) are among the most recent literary works which mirror the Sub-Saharan immigrants' journey in contemporary America. Relying on the previously mentioned novels, I am intending to examine the effects of displacement on the African immigrants' identity as a primary objective in the light of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon's postcolonial concepts. Based on the experiences of the protagonists, the concepts of displacement, mimicry, otherness and identity is further highlighted due to their immense importance in understanding the mechanism of dealing with the drastic changes after immigration. The second objective is to investigate the impact of the various social identifications and categorizations of the African immigrants using Turner and Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. In addition, the concept of individual mobility is discussed as a coping mechanism to shed light on the resulting negative social identity. The third objective is to identify the phases that African immigrants go through during the process of becoming black. This latter is analyzed through the Nigrescence Theory by William Cross as it paves the way for a better understanding of the process through which African immigrants start to embrace their black identity. The writers' portrayal gave voice to the characters and allowed the reader to discover the journey of immigration through the eyes of Africans. This representation was the incentive for conducting this study through the examination of the previously mentioned novel in the light of different theories to build a more compelling analysis. The blend between literary and social psychological theories gave a more in-depth analysis for the fascinating anecdotes which have been studied from the reading of various scholars. The examination of three contemporary diasporic African novels revealed the effects of immigration and to what extent they help in

empowering and enhancing the immigrants' sense of home along with appreciating their blackness and their African culture. Moreover, the study allowed us to fully comprehend their journey from self-hatred to self-acceptance which paved the way for them to embrace their Black identity and increased their Black pride.



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**ANJAKAN, IDENTITI SOSIAL DAN NIGRESCENCE DALAM NOVEL
AFRIKA KONTEMPORARI TERPILIH**

Oleh

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Suara penderitaan daripada pendatang Afrika di Amerika telah digambarkan dalam kesusasteraan Afrika kontemporari dari perspektif yang lebih sahih. Tanggapan diaspora Afrika kontemporari memainkan peranan utama dalam menghapuskan cerita tunggal dan stereotaip yang dibina oleh orang-orang Barat terhadap orang Afrika. Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) dan Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) adalah antara karya sastera terbaru yang mencerminkan perjalanan pendatang Sub-Sahara di Amerika kontemporari. Berdasarkan novel-novel yang disebutkan, saya ingin mengkaji kesan perpindahan terhadap identiti pendatang Afrika sebagai objektif utama berdasarkan konsep pascakolonial oleh Edward Said, Homi Bhabha dan Frantz Fanon. Berdasarkan pengalaman para protagonis, konsep perpindahan, peniruan, kebersamaan dan identiti lebih diserlahkan kerana kepentingannya yang sangat besar dalam memahami mekanisme dalam menangani perubahan drastik setelah imigrasi. Objektif kedua adalah untuk menyiasat kesan pelbagai identifikasi sosial dan pengkategorian pendatang Afrika menggunakan Teori Identiti Sosial Turner dan Tajfel. Di samping itu, konsep mobiliti individu dibincangkan sebagai mekanisme penyelesaian dalam menjelaskan identiti sosial negatif yang dihasilkan. Objektif ketiga adalah untuk mengenal pasti fasa-fasa yang dilalui oleh pendatang Afrika ketika dalam proses menjadi hitam. Analisis terakhir adalah melalui Teori Nigrescence oleh William Cross kerana membuka jalan untuk pemahaman yang lebih dalam mengenai proses di mana pendatang Afrika mulai merangkul identiti hitam mereka. Penggambaran penulis memberi suara kepada watak-watak dan membolehkan pembaca mengetahui perjalanan imigrasi melalui mata orang Afrika. Perlambangan ini adalah insentif untuk melakukan kajian melalui pemeriksaan novel yang disebutkan dengan mempertimbangkan teori yang berbeza untuk membina analisis yang lebih menarik. Campuran antara teori sastera dan psikologi sosial memberikan analisis yang lebih mendalam untuk anekdot menarik yang telah dikaji dari pembacaan para cendekiawan. Pemeriksaan terhadap tiga novel Afrika diaspora kontemporari mendedahkan kesan

imigrasi dan sejauh mana ia membantu dalam memperkasakan dan meningkatkan perasaan imigran di rumah dengan menghargai warna kulit dan budaya Afrika mereka. Lebih-lebih lagi, kajian ini membolehkan kita memahami sepenuhnya perjalanan mereka dari kebencian kepada penerimaan diri yang membuka jalan bagi mereka untuk merangkul identiti warna kulit hitam mereka dan meningkatkan harga diri mereka.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Africa has always been a target of the Western countries due to its richness and the availability of powerful inhabitants who were cruelly used as cheap labors. Hence, slavery marked the initial step of the vast movement from African to the European countries and the Americas. Besides slavery, there was the wave of colonization which marked another era of suffering and exploitation in the African countries. This colonization engraved deep transformations in the lives of the colonized people on a cultural, economic and linguistic level. After the abolishment of slavery through a constitutional law in the United States in 1865, authors started using literature to mirror the era of slavery. However, their portrayal was merely a Western depiction which is far from what was actually happening. This fact triggered writers from African descents to bring back justice to slaves through literary narratives which portray the inhumane conditions that the slaves were living and the impact of its traumatization on the succeeding generations. Moreover, slavery and colonization are considered to be the very first reasons why immigration has started to occur forcibly at the beginning then it gradually became voluntary out of the extreme influence of colonization.

Immigrants tend to experience both the ecstasy and the agony of their migration. For this reason, migrant literature flourished lately to cover the immigration's different facets since the very start of this phenomenon until the present day. During immigration, Africans go through the same steps of colonization where their national culture was framed. At the beginning, Africans seek acceptance and assimilation under the influence of the colonizer/host country. Making all attempts to become: "more English than the English" (Ashcroft 4) and they abandon their own native culture due to its perception as low-graded and inferior. This is what Bhabha has termed as 'mimicry' in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" where he clarifies the fragile relation between mimicry and identity or the African presence precisely stating that, "Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask: it is not what Césaire describes as 'colonialization- thingification' behind which there stands the essence of the *présence Africaine*" (88). Bhabha further elaborated the meaning of mimicry using Lacan's viewpoint and he argues that, "In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance" (90).

In the second phase, they come to understand that they can never become equal to the colonizer or the whites in general. This realization enables them to embrace their national culture and appreciate their black identity. According to Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), it is due to the emergence of Negritude, as a concept

that unites all Blacks and encourage them to accept and appreciate who they really are, Africans developed a nationalist consciousness (Mambrol 1). Before Negritude, Africans were torn apart due to their displacement in the Americas which eventually marked the absence of their African culture. They were subjected to a hostile western culture that does not resemble theirs. Therefore, they ended up blending both cultures and managing to live by what they had. The emergence of Negritude led them to develop a sense of anti-colonial feeling and Black consciousness where they fought all what is related to colonialism. When it comes to migration in this phase, immigrants might hold negative, oppressive and loathing feeling against the Americans or they would not feel the need to impress them anymore.

Immigrants find themselves caught and entrapped in the dilemma of choosing between the new or the traditional culture, the new or the old world. By leaving their country, they face alienation and displacement which is a key concept in the postcolonial theory. Displacement occurs when: “specific cultural population is moved from its original homeland or bioregion and relocated to a different setting” (Mani 44). Unlike those who suffered due to the forced uprootedness they were subjected to during slavery/colonial era, present day immigrants are considered to be more educated and more aware about the process of voluntary immigration. However, they feel displaced, alienated and dislocated once they reach their dream land and become culturally shocked because of the considerable hardships and frustrations in the new world. Salman Rushdie stresses the vital necessity not to generalize the migrancy experience because for him, “we are not all migrants in the same way. The experiences of migration differ, and this is one of the crucial distinctions to be made in any discussion of the subject” (Sharma 579). Immigrants all over the world face what Bhabha termed “the unhomeliness” which stands for: “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation” (9) as a result of their geographic, linguistic and cultural displacement.

With its fluid nature, immigration prevents people from enjoying a fixed and stable identity after being exposed to the drastic changes because identity cannot be separated and isolated from the new, exotic social context, “human identity is not only natural and stable but constructed and occasionally even invented outright” (Said 332). It is evident how identity is shaped through the cultural milieu and cannot be dissociated from the social changes and the new environment. The Black identity specifically is deeply and strongly related to the blacks’ historical circumstances throughout the eras of slavery and colonialism. All these historical conditions transformed blacks’ identity and they can never detach their present from what their ancestors previously went through. Immigrant writers elaborated more the strong, “relationship between self and place” (Ashcroft et al. 8). They mirrored the flexibility of identity and the ability of immigrants to re/invent and re/construct their identities according to the new economic, linguistic, racial, social and cultural factors in the host country. Cultural identity is formed through transformation in immigration as it was argued by Stuart Hall in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” and for him it can be understood in two ways. The first definition of cultural identity is a shared “one true self” between people who have a common history. From another angle, he considers cultural identity as, “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’” which reflects the interconnectedness

of the cultural identity and the historical context, “It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture” (112).

The interwoven relationship between identity and society was the crucial pivot for the foundation of Tajfel & Turner’s Social Identity Theory (SIT) which they used to understand the nature that ties the individual with society. It was primarily known as ‘social identity/social comparison theory’ (Tajfel & Turner 41) before it was developed and expanded by Turner and his colleagues to the Self Categorization Theory (1982-1990) after Tajfel’s death. The initial purpose behind the Social Identity Theory was to figure out the psychological reasons that lead individuals to in-group discrimination (Haslam 18). The application of this social psychological theory will help us understand the changes that Africans go through after immigration. The new social context of immigrants entails their social identification to a given social group and sometimes they can identify themselves with multiple social groups. According to Stets and Burke (2000), “A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category” (225). People tend to identify themselves with a given group according to their shared values, ethnicity, religion... etc. This identification and categorization can be dynamic under various reasons. One can easily change from one group to another to reach a higher status and this is called individual mobility or they can opt for social creativity which occurs through different strategies such as changing values when comparing groups or picking up another referent group. The last mechanism is social competition where a group engages in a social action in order to confirm the value of one’s group.

Historically, black identity was limited to the concept of self-hatred as reflected in the “racial doll test” where identical dolls, except their color, are displayed in front of black children and it is their call to choose between the two. Children ended up choosing the white doll over the dark skinned one. This study was primarily designed by Mamie Clark and her husband Kenneth Clark aiming at revealing the effects of segregation on black children and how it leads them to generate a feeling of inferiority because of their skin color. Their writings were very crucial during the Civil Rights Movement which demanded for a more assimilated and integrated society without any racial segregations (Pickren and Tomes 51). Nonetheless, the discourse of Black identity has been witnessing the birth of scholars who focus on the psychology of Blacks and contributed to the emergence of the Nigrescence Theory. Nigrescence is derived from the French term “*la négrescence*” which is the literal meaning for *becoming black* (Vandiver 166).

The Nigrescence Theory was originally introduced by William E. Cross, Jr. in 1971 where he proposed the original model characterized with five stages of black identity development which was explained by Beverley J. Vandiver as, “the process of accepting and affirming a Black identity in an American context by moving from Black self-hatred to Black self-acceptance” (166). In 1991, Cross revised the Nigrescence model in his *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* making some changes on the original model leading him to develop the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) (Vandiver et al. 2002) while the Expanded Nigrescence model is considered to

be the most recent version (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Cross explains the alterations that people experience as reflected in the stages of identity development highlighting that, “Nigrescence models begin with people who place *low* salience on being Black, but in the aftermath of a challenging encounter move to find a way to *change* their identity to make it reflect *high* salience for race” (123). The employment of this theory on the immigrant characters of the selected literary works enables us to establish a solid framework to figure out the process through which African immigrants finally embrace their black identity.

This study aims to mirror the contemporary African diaspora through the novels of three contemporary African writers, the Nigerian Chimamanda Adichie, the Zimbabwean NoViolet Bulawayo and the Cameroonian Imbolo Mbue. The emergence of literary works which give authentic voices to the Africans immigrants paved the way for us to view their true experiences. Therefore, such works should be analyzed from different perspectives which are the primary aim of this research as it strives to point out the process of self-acceptance that Africans go through during their immigration. In order to achieve this goal, three African novels were carefully selected namely *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, *We Need New Names* (2013) by NoViolet Bulawayo and *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) by Imbolo Mbue. These novels provide the best reflection of what the average African immigrant endure which makes them the finest groundwork for the desired analysis. The main characters will be studied from an interdisciplinary outline, primarily focusing on the effect of displacement on the immigrants’ identities since they came from postcolonial countries. This will be the foundation for a further exploration as we cannot separate the individuals from societies. Therefore, to understand the social relations that the African immigrants create in the American society, the study will use Tajfel and Turner’s theory of Social Identity. This theory will enable us to deduce the bond that ties societies with identities as they are both known with their fluid nature. This research will continue its examination to reach the Nigrescence theory which enables us to discover the process through which the immigrant characters withstand to embrace their black identity. This theory is based on the work of the researcher William E. Cross Jr. who is best known for his research in black identity development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The African diaspora enjoyed massive attention throughout history and their struggles have been depicted through literary works for centuries. However, the depiction was solely a Western narrative which distorted the real image of Africa and the African diaspora. This led to the emergence of African writers who write about the African immigrants’ experiences from a more authentic perspective in order to deconstruct the single story and the stereotypes that the Westerners have built against Africans. Without forgetting the instilled image and concept of the American dream that Africans have been longing for.

In the selected literary novels, the American dream is projected, consumed and distorted through the experiences of the migrated characters which mirror the deception of the Africans' expectations after living in the U.S. The revealed superficiality truth about the American dream is a way that these writers opted for in order to highlight a very neglected and fantasized image about the West which does not necessarily exist in reality. From the other side, these literary works reflect on how Africa is perceived through the eyes of Americans as a single place, a source of poverty and sickness, and how these limited perceptions affect the immigrants.

This study aims to unravel the double facets of the African immigration to the United States. Through the examination of three contemporary diasporic African novels, we attempt to analyze the effects of immigration and to what extent they help in empowering and enhancing the immigrants' sense of home along with appreciating their blackness and their African culture. This does not entail that immigration does not have downfalls. Due to their suffering after immigration, Africans develop a sense of belonging to their home and they feel a stronger relationship toward their peers from the same race and culture. To reach the goal of this study, three literary works have been selected in order to tackle the issue of immigration from a fresh point of view as depicted in the novels which are written by contemporary African authors who themselves experienced immigration and lived all its ups and downs.

The existing studies on the African immigration in the United States focused largely on the problems of racism that the immigrants suffer from and how it affects their identity especially for those who were forced to migrate or the descendants of slaves. Scholars have been exposing the truth about multiculturalism in America and how deceitful they have been portrayed throughout the digital world to hide the layered racism and stereotypes in Western societies. Moreover, the available readings are exclusively presented from a postcolonial or a feminist theory without taking into account further dimensions of the effect of immigration in the contemporary era. Hence, this thesis will be based on not only a postcolonial perspective, but on a social psychological level as well. Concepts of displacement, mimicry, identity and otherness will be the core of the postcolonial theoretical framework. As immigrants experience the physical, cultural and social displacement and it is a key concept that will be studied according to what extent the voluntary immigration has affected the characters' sense of alienation and non-belonging in a journey of seeking acceptance in their host country.

W.E.B Du Bois was among the first to note the alienation in Afro-Americans by coining the term of "twoness" which stands for the feeling of being torn apart from what one wants and should be. In her *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois says that, "one ever feels his twoness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (215) and she believes that the identity struggle between being African or American is inescapable. Hence, once dislocated from their home country, identity becomes a major issue in the lives of immigrants due to the unexpected atmosphere that they find themselves in. Being treated as foreigners, strangers and outsiders, triggers an inner discomfort and threatens

their whole sense of self which in return becomes an incentive that increases their motive for blending into the new society. Otherness, from the other side is an essential concept in postcolonial theory since the exposure of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized through the works of both Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* (1967). Immigrants still find themselves Otherved by the dominant West even in a contemporary context where the era of colonization is over.

By embracing all what is American to prevent any potential discrimination, African immigrants predict the initial approval from the host society to the point where they forcibly or intentionally mimic Americans in their manners, language and lifestyle because they perceive their culture as inferior compared to the Americans'. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha denotes that mimicry symbolizes a way of manifestation and transformation, "Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (86). These postcolonial concepts were rarely studied and analyzed through the chosen novels, which paves the way to a deeper exploration in this thesis.

A number of scholars have focused on the feminist theory to analyze the selected novels especially *Americanah* where they stress the importance of love as a theme in the life of the main character. Ben-Iheanacho "Agency and Vulnerability: Reconfiguring the Female Characters in Chimamanda Adichie's Love Stories" (2017) is one of the articles which focuses on the concepts of agency and vulnerability and how they affect the individual's self-empowerment. Another vital element in all the selected novels is the American dream which is regarded as an indirect effect of colonization and the false perception of America through the single story that the Africans are subjected to. Gbenga Olorunsiwa has studied the role of the American dream in the diaspora experiences in the narratives of African writers like Aidoo, Cole and Adichie. In the case of Adichie's *Americanah*, he explored the racial and economic insecurities after immigration but he did not tackle the identity changes after having a negative social identity and moving back toward their Black identity or even the notion of going back home which is highly important in the novel. As this latter reflects the evolution of the character's identity.

Race or Blackness was studied as well in several articles but it was only from one single point of view where researchers focused more on the notion of race before and after immigration. In the period of before immigration like Silindiwe Sibanda's "Ways of Reading Blackness: Exploring Stereotyped Constructions of Blackness in No Violet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*" (2018), the writer paid attention to the self-perception of Zimbabweans back in their country in the midst of the economic and political crisis. However, the study does not include the period after immigration and the struggles that the characters were enduring. All these studies and other, which will be discussed in details in chapter two, examined the issues of race, gender and class through the postcolonial and feminist theories but they have not continued their examination where the characters start looking at themselves differently and their

identities drastically change due to several circumstances. These changes are going to be the central focus of my study as I intend to address this gap and extend the analysis of the novels beyond the postcolonial lens and move forward to apply social psychological theories. These theories will allow me to analyze the characters' social identifications and categorizations after immigration and how they cope with the negative social identity. My thesis will not stop at this phase but I will deeply examine the process that the characters undergo to embrace their Black identity.

During the journey of migration, immigrants face drastic social changes as they find themselves between the choice of keeping a touch with people from the same race, ethnicity, and country or cut all the ties with them and join the Americans regardless of the huge differences between the two. This latter is regarded as social identification where a person identifies with a group that he belongs to i.e. an in-group and the other group that he does not belong to is called the out-group. Social Identity Theory (SIT) stands for the belief that people naturally perceive themselves as members of a specific group (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1986). When immigrants locate themselves in a particular group, they develop an intergroup discrimination favoring the in-group and from the other side, it provokes a competition toward the relevant out-group. After their arrival, immigrants find it difficult to identify with their peers and leave the glamour and the polished lives of Americans. This theory is primarily present in social psychological studies and they often study immigrants' behavior according to their social groups, but it is rarely found to be used in literary analysis. Mangum and Block (2018) have studied the American public opinion towards immigration through the Social Identity Theory where they concluded that Americans' oppose the legal immigration and they prefer to combat and stop immigration.

After immigration, some people may feel that their in-group or their social identity is degraded and not valued. Therefore, they opt for one of the three main coping mechanisms identified by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). The first mechanism is individual mobility where a person dissociates himself from his in-group seeking more social satisfaction and acceptance. According to Rachel Shinnar in her "Coping with Negative Social Identity: The Case of Mexican Immigrants" (2008), immigrants might go for assimilation and acculturation after reaching the host country in order to belong to a better in-group and distance themselves from their ethnic group. Tajfel and Turner (1986) further explained that individual mobility, "implies attempts, on an individual basis, to achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower- to a higher-status group" (19). The second strategy is social creativity where an individual may change the compared out-group and choose an alternative one which meets some adjusted criteria. These criteria can be redefined according to the desired perception that one may seek in order to rationalize the unwelcomed features and make them more satisfactory and appealing. Immigrants can use a comparison method to make themselves feel better compared by their situation before immigration. Social competition is regarded to be the last coping mechanism which stands for the engagement of a group in a social activity for the sake of obtaining equality with the out-group. In the case of immigrants, they usually seek acceptance by the majority culture and not discriminated against because they are different. As a result, my research intends to address this gap and project these social concepts to analyze literary

works and deeply examine the characters throughout their journey of immigration as they are exposed to completely diverse societies.

An in-depth investigation is required to study the process through which African immigrants become blacks and reach a point where they start appreciating their African identity and culture. This enquiry can be achieved through the application of the social psychological theory of Nigrescence which is rarely applied in studying literary texts. Contemporary African immigrants tend to be brainwashed with the glorious promises of the American dream and they eventually live all their lives dreaming about going to America seeking success and acceptance in a Western society. As it was stated by Du Bois (1986), “the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (364–5) which describes the case of immigrants who are desperate for others’ acceptance and they ignore who they really are or try to change themselves to fit in the new society. However, immigration can be a powerful means for some immigrants to discover their true selves. This is why Nigrescence theory will help us to understand through analyzing the characters’ process of becoming black as depicted in the selected literary works.

There are other studies like Kimméra Naidoo “Name Rhymes with Shame”: Representations of Migrant Women Protagonists in Selected African Texts” (2017) which includes both novels *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* where the author analyzed the former using Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the subaltern to explore the representation of the lives of African migrant women protagonists. She focused more to what extent the texts capture the painful emotions and experiences of female migrants who are subject to double prejudice. Liya Endale in her “The Multidimensional Model of Black Identity and Nigrescence Theory: A Philosophical Comparison” explored the difference between two prominent racial identity theories and the Nigrescence theory providing their historical and cultural contexts to better understand the African American identity. We can clearly see that the available readings of the selected novels are exclusively presented from a postcolonial or a feminist theory without taking into account further social and psychological dimensions of the effect of immigration in the contemporary era. In addition, most of the existing studies concerning the Social Identity theory and Nigrescence are conducted in the fields of sociology and psychology only and they have never been included in the field of literature which is a gap I am willing to address in order to enrich my research since literature has always been interlinked with other fields especially social psychology. The inclusion of these theories to analyze the previously mentioned literary texts altogether, will give us a wide insight into the journey of African immigrants and analyze it not focusing solely on the disadvantages but highlighting the other face of immigration and its contribution in the process of becoming Blacks and embracing their true selves.

1.3 Research Objectives

The first objective of this study is designed to examine the effects of displacement on African immigrants as depicted in the selected novels. It is highly important to study the incentives behind the Africans immigration according to the selected literary works and the danger of the American dream's single story. This will be achieved through the lens of postcolonial theory, focusing more on concepts of displacement, mimicry, Otherness, identity and relying on the pioneers of this theory specifically Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon. In this objective, we will highlight the effects of immigration on Africans who migrate voluntarily seeking a better life and they end up dealing with the unexpected harsh circumstances that welcome them in America.

The second objective is to investigate the impact of the social identifications and categorizations on African immigrants as depicted in the selected literary works. Based on the Social Identity Theory (SIT), this study will examine the social identification and categorization (from the point of view of Tajfel and Turner, 1979) that immigrants opt for to join an in-group. After reaching the host country, African immigrants prefer to belong to an in-group with a higher status. This leads them to an individual mobility where they choose to leave their group and join another one. These concepts will be examined according to the selected novels to reveal to what extent African immigrants are influenced by their identification and how it alters their identity.

The third objective of this study is to examine the different processes that the characters go through to embrace their Black identity. This objective will be achieved through the examination of the characters according to the Nigerscense theory which reflects on the process of becoming black. Africans do not realize that they are blacks until they immigrate and they start identifying themselves through the eyes of others (i.e. Americans). At the end of their journey of successive trials to melt into and espouse the American identity, they realize that they will never fit in. Based on the selected novels, this thesis will explore how African immigrants start to embrace their black identity and adopt a sense of black pride which eventually paves the way for them to gain back their whole true self as Africans.

1.4 Research Questions

This research is intended to answer the most debated questions which are:

1. How does displacement affect African immigrants as depicted in the selected novels?
2. What is the impact of the social identifications and categorizations on African immigrants as depicted in the selected literary works?
3. What are the different processes that the characters go through to embrace their Black identity?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Authors use their literary works as a weapon to dismantle and break the Western stereotypes and the exaggerated vision of America for the African population. They attempt to expose what Chimamanda Adichie called “the danger of a single story” from both sides, Americans and Africans. The wide spread of false stories about immigration increase the desire for Africans to leave for their dream land without bearing in mind the challenges and struggles that they might face. This fact led to the emergence of young diasporic writers who speak up for the conflicting reality of the African immigrants in America, revealing the hidden challenges that most of the immigrants go through. Authors use their personal immigrating experiences to unmask the over generalized racial stereotypes that the Americans hold against Africans from one side. Africa is regarded as a single entity without really differentiating between the various countries in the African continent. This is widespread among Americans who view Africans as poor and uncivilized inhabitants.

This thesis seeks to study the impact of immigration on Africans from a different point of view as it will stress the danger of a single story that the Africans have regarding the idealized image of America and how this false perspective leads to serious social complexities. The incorporation of social psychological theories will give an in depth exploration of the contemporary implication of immigration on Africans. The fact that individuals cannot separate themselves from society explains their spontaneous social identification and categorization within a single or multiple social groups. Most importantly, this thesis highlights the influence of immigration on the African immigrants’ sense of home and their appreciation of their black identity as depicted in the selected literary works.

However, we hardly find a study that pays attention to immigration on the social or psychological levels especially for African immigrants or people of color in general. In fact, this provides my thesis the chance to further dig deeper into the journey of contemporary African immigrants to get a clearer understanding of their process of becoming black. Through the usage of an interdisciplinary framework, I will be able to analyze the selected literary texts from the postcolonial concepts of displacement, mimicry, otherness and identity along with the Social Identity Theory focusing on the concepts of social categorization, social identification and the individual mobility. Adding to that, a social psychological theory of Nigrescence with its different stages to figure out how immigrants come to a conclusion that they will never belong to and fit in the western society. Instead, they embrace their African black identity and they appreciate more their home, culture and all what makes them who they really are.

The selected novels have been studied in articles from the lens of postcolonial and feminist theories, focusing on the issues of class, gender, and race without a deeper exploration of the socio psychological perspectives which hold a great importance in the development of the African immigrants’ identities. Regarding Adichie, Saada Deni’s (2016) paper entitled “A Nigritudinal Paradigm: Chimamanda Adichie’s

Americanah, a “Different Mirror” of America and a Restoration of African Self-awareness” has examined the novel through postcolonial and Negritude lens without providing an in-depth inspection of the characters’ social and psychological state before and after immigration. Koskei Chepkorir and Ben-Iheanacho have focused on the feminist paradigm in *Americanah* and how females are represented in contemporary African literature. Concerning NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, it was mainly tackled in several studies where scholars like Tembi Charles (2016) focused on the Zimbabwean Crisis and others stressed on the importance of naming in the novel. The least studied text is Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* where few studies can be found examining the representation of the economic crisis and the concept of the American dream. Most of the previously mentioned studies regarding the effect of immigration on Africans lack a profound assessment of how African immigrants embrace their black identity after immigration. As a result, exploring the results from immigration from a different angle will enrich the scholarship of contemporary African literature.

From a journey of realizing dreams in a country full of prosperity and opportunities, immigrants find themselves in a journey of rejection, nostalgia, homesickness, and self-discovery. They discover the hidden and true meaning of displacement in different levels. However, what they recite for their family and friends back home is totally the opposite. They never talk about the hardships they suffer daily after immigration, or the reality about easily finding a job and having a better life and realizing their long fabricated American dream. Instead, African immigrants mask all the realities in the West to “save face” and in order not to humiliate themselves and spread their failure among their African peers. Whether it is consciously or unconsciously, the immigrants themselves are reinforcing the single story about America and encouraging others to immigrate instead of warning them about the downfalls of immigration and preventing them from leaving their homes for an uncertain, fragile and hard dream to be achieved. This is highly visible in the selected literary works and it has to be highlighted through the examination of the characters’ attitude toward the changes that immigration brings to their lives and the effects on their identity after believing in the single story of the American dream. For a more enriching examination of the numerous effects of immigration, it is very crucial not to ignore the social and psychological state of the African immigrants as they play a vital role in shaping their identity because one cannot separate the individual from his society or psyche.

Adichie’s concept of the single story has drastically altered the readers’ way of thinking as we became more aware of the importance of not building up a narrowed story of a certain ethnicity, culture or a country because, “stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower and to humanize” (Adichie 2016). This study unfolds the layered stories of the African immigrants in contemporary America as the selected literary works strive to mirror their journey enabling the reader to enlighten, broaden and deconstruct the encircled way of thinking since, “the second we understand that there is never a single story, we can change the typical mindset that has been build due to the society we live in” (Reflected Words 2020). The emphasis on the single story throughout the analysis of the selected novels will significantly expand the analytical dimensions which gives this research a

distinguished contribution in the field of literary analysis and social psychological studies.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The selected theories of postcolonialism, Social Identity Theory and the Nigrescence Theory serve as an important framework to read the formation of contemporary African immigrant identities. Postcolonial theory will be limited to the most relevant concepts of displacement, mimicry, Otherness and identity through the readings of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon. To add a more in depth analysis into my research, I opted for the social psychological theories of Social Identity and the Nigrescence. The former is based on the works of Tajfel and Turner's concept of Social Categorization and Identification along with the coping mechanism of individual mobility. The latter, revolves around Cross and Vandiver's process of becoming black.

The application of socio psychological theories to literary criticism will enrich and expand the research when analyzing the characters in order to understand the contemporary African immigrants' identities. Since individuals cannot be separated from society, then postcolonial theory is regarded to be the best fit for the background of the research's literary analysis. Colonialism plays a vital role in shaping the colonized people's lives and this influence transcends throughout generations. Hence, Africans are of great extent affected by their society in a postcolonial setting. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is considered to be the work which developed postcolonial theory and paved the way for its powerful invasion in the field of literary criticism. Postcolonial theory flourished with the publications of Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1987), Bill Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994), and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

Postcolonial writings are a tool and an outcome of the writings of people who were subjected to the injustices, discriminations, and humiliations of colonizers as Ashcroft and Ahluwalia claimed in his *Edward Said* (2001) that postcolonial theory investigates the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies (15). It projects the hidden realities behind the Western representation of the colonized countries and the civilization that colonizers claim to spread by erasing the national identity of the colonized and replacing it with all what is Western, White and Superior. Postcolonial novels are written to mirror the, "unequal relations of power based on binary opposition: "Us" and "them", "First World" and "third world", "White" and "black", "Colonizer" and "colonized"" (Kehinde 108). This engraved a sense of inferiority and subordination for the colonized and instilled the mere idea of the West's supremacy which clarifies their eagerness to leave their homeland seeking the acclaimed "superiority" at the expense of their true self.

The geographical migration is even more layered to include further and profounder cultural and social displacement which unconsciously scars and shatters their souls and identities. Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994) argues that, “In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). The clash of cultures from another side imposes a huge burden on immigrants to preserve their culture and hold onto its meaning and not to let the western culture deceive them, for Bhabha, “Culture emerges as a problem, or a problematic, at the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, genders, races, nations” (34). While immigrants opt for the conformation and assimilation, they mimic the westerners to create a more polished image about themselves and build a good impression while interacting with different people as it was suggested by Geuguen et al. “One of the most famous explanations of why mimicry influences social behavior and judgment is explained by the desire of human to create affiliation and rapport when they interact with somebody else” (256).

Immigrants tend to re/construct a certain image of self to successfully escape the Othering classification. This is a key concept in postcolonial theory and by including it into the framework of this study, it will help us gain a deeper understanding of what Edward Said and Frantz Fanon examined as the binary relationship in the immigrants’ identity of Self/Other, Orient/Occident, Superior/Inferior in their *Orientalism* (1978) and *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) respectively. Western scholars have always been spreading the “us versus them” reinforcing the principle of binary oppositions which serves at contrasting between two distinct terms or ideas that prefers one over the other, Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) argues: “When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real *other* of the white man is and will continue to be the black man.” (195). Therefore, African writers’ inclusion of binaries within their texts is an interesting approach which needs to be highlighted in order to figure out whether they support or deconstruct the western stereotypes held against African immigrants.

This thesis will be based not only on postcolonialism as a literary theory, but also on social psychological theories which will broaden the analysis of the selected novels. Relying on Social Identity Theory to study the socio-psychological behavior of African immigrants in literature will allow us to understand how African immigrants identify themselves to certain social groups as they withhold an in-group relational and comparative social identification. Du Bois (1986) has always been addressing the importance of to what extent individuals care about how other people see them through his notion of double consciousness stating that, “the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (364–5). Consequently, it is highly essential to study the perception of the African immigrants’ selves in their new social context and the effects of their social categorization among groups on their social identity, as stated by Turner (1982) that, “Social identity is the cognitive mechanism that makes group behaviour possible” (21). By acquiring a new social identity after immigration, Africans set a specific attitude toward their in-group or they can simultaneously hold multiple group identifications. According to Tajfel & Turner, this social categorization

and identification is not static and it is subject to change under several circumstances through individual mobility, social creativity or social competition. Therefore, only the individual mobility will be included in this study due to its relevance in the selected literary texts.

For the sake of achieving the third objective of this study and discover the process through which African immigrants manage to accept their black identity, the Nigrescence theory (Cross and Vandiver, 2001) is found to be the better theory that can be used. The Nigrescence theory is specifically designed to examine the stages of becoming black as argued by Cross (1994): “Most identity models start not at the point of change but with an analysis on the identity *to be changed*” (122). However, the analysis of the selected texts will be limited to the first four stages only because of the irrelevance application of the last stage on the characters. In the very first stage (Pre-Encounter) blacks are believed to hold anti-Black attitude with low self-esteem and self-hating personality as they long for acceptance among the Whites. They start to question and reexamine their racial identity in the second stage (Encounter) due to a given encounter that becomes an incentive for them to feel that they are not black enough. This leads them to the third transitional stage (Immersion/Emersion), Cross describes this transition as, “for within its boundaries, the old identity and the emerging identity do battle” (122). Afterwards, the new identity emerges in the fourth stage (Internalization) where the person builds a sense of appreciation and acceptance of his Black identity, becoming psychologically healthier. In the last stage (Internalization-Commitment), blacks are characterized to be very comfortable with their Blackness and Cross (1991) acknowledged three layered identities in this stage where some blacks can be Nationalists, Biculturalists, and Multiculturalists.

1.7 Methodology

To explore this thesis, textual analysis will be used to analyze the selected novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013), NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013) and Imbolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers* (2016), for the purpose of bringing to light the journey of embracing one’s black identity as a result of immigration. The main characters’ pursuit of happiness in another country will be examined as it has been regarded as a symbol of prosperity, success and opportunities. Postcolonial concepts of displacement, mimicry, identity and otherness will be employed to read to what extent immigration has affected Africans who struggle between their home country and the assimilation into the American society to get rid of their inferiority as Africans.

The main focus of our analysis will be the black protagonists who lived in Africa then voluntarily immigrated to America. Therefore, we will not be looking into the white characters in the selected literary works. The carefully chosen characters will be analyzed according to their identity changes and how do they react to the social alterations. This will be achieved through the use of a reliable interdisciplinary conceptual framework which consists of postcolonialism as a literary theory, in

addition to the Social Identity and Nigrescence as social psychological theories.

The postcolonial theory itself is a wide range field so only few concepts were picked to examine the characters in chapter three. Relying on the perspectives of Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, the concepts of displacement, mimicry, otherness and identity will be highlighted owing to their crucial role in examining the experiences that the characters endure during their immigration. Such experiences determine the postcolonial impact on the mindset of the protagonists as they are bound to achieve the lives that they are exposed to since childhood. Hence, these concepts reveal the challenges that the immigrants face and how they eventually shape their identities.

This social conflict is going to be examined in chapter four through Tajfel and Turner's theory of Social Identity. This theory has been mainly used to analyze case studies in social psychology where researchers focus on the behavior and attitudes of individuals according to their social categorizations. There are few cases where immigrants were the center of attention in some papers such as Shinnar's study entitled "Coping with Negative Social Identity: The Case of Mexican Immigrants" (2008). Additionally, it is crucial to figure out how do African immigrants end up appreciating their true self as Blacks and value their national culture, embracing all what is African. The latter is going to be achieved in chapter five relying on the Nigrescence Theory which will lead our way to uncover the African immigrants' process of becoming Blacks as it is depicted in the literary works. Pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion and internalization are the central focus in this study. The previously mentioned concepts will enrich the literary analysis since they bring new social and psychological perspectives to the novels. Social psychology is vital to understand the drastic social changes that African immigrants are still exposed to in the present time.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study is conducted within the framework of the literary theory of postcolonialism along with social psychological theories. Under these theories, we opted for specific concepts which serve to reveal the immigration's role in shacking the African's identities and leading them to discover the falseness of the American dream and to realize the uniqueness of their Black identity. Wielding the reading of Bhabha, Fanon and Said to trace the various changes in the immigrants' identity, mimicry and otherness resulted from the displacement that the main characters go through in *Americanah*, *We Need New Names*, and *Behold the Dreamers*.

To dig deeper into the African immigrants' process of dressing up their true selves as Blacks, the aforementioned literary works will be examined from a socio-psychological perspective employing the concepts of social categorization, social identification and the individual mobility. As far as the Nigrescence theory is concerned, the study will be limited to Cross and Vandiver's first four stages of Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion and Internalization only as they are more

relevant to the main characters of the selected novels. The remaining stage (Internalization/Commitment) will not be taken into account while analyzing the characters' process of becoming black because it is more concerned with the political engagement, which is not present in the selected literary works.

The feminist and gender readings of the selected texts are excluded from this thesis because of the availability of different studies which are dedicated to the detailed interrogation of the challenges faced by female African immigrants. Race, gender and class issues have been slightly covered to study the effect of immigration on African's identity. However, the focus has always been on the negativity of immigration as it was highlighted in most of the other literary works without taking into consideration the effect of immigration in enhancing the Africans' black identity as it was emphasized in *Americanah*, *We Need New Names* and *Behold the Dreamers*.

1.9 Justification of Text Selection

Many Africans happen to buy into the romanticized notion of the American dream which can be regarded as one of the incentives that launched new literary voices to decolonize the African mind and to shed light on the ugly truth behind the illusion of migration to America which can be misleading and deceptive for many people. The myth of the American dream is reinforced through the portrayal of America as the Promised Land in Television shows and publicities which misrepresent the blacks in America. They are depicted as happy, successful and enjoying the privileges that they found in the paradise which plays a misleading role to compose a cloudy and unclear vision for Africans who get confusing and unrealistic dreams about migrating to America for the sake of living a better life.

The chosen contemporary African writers for this study represent the youths' immigration experiences from a fresh perspective. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer who migrated to America to study when she was twenty years old, she has been mostly known for her famous TED talk in 2009 entitled "The Danger of a Single Story" which became the most watched TED talk of all times. Chimamanda has three novels namely, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013) and a collection of short stories entitled *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009). Her latest novel *Americanah* received several awards like the National Book Critics Circle Award and was named one of *The New York Times* top ten best books of 2013. NoViolet Bulawayo is the pen name of Elizabeth Zandile Tshele. She is the first Zimbabwean and black African woman to be shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize owing to her debut novel *We Need New Names* (2013). Bulawayo won the Hemingway Foundation/Pen Award, the Etisalat Prize for Literature, and the National Book Foundation "5 under 35" Fiction Selection and others. *Behold the Dreamers* (2016) is a *New York Times* bestseller debut novel by the Cameroonian writer Imbolo Mbue. The novel has been translated into more than 12 languages and it won the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, the Blue Metropolis Words to Change Award, and was an Oprah's Book Club selection.

The reason behind selecting the aforementioned novels lies in their examination of the plights of African immigrants' community in the U.S from a different perspective where they stress the intricacies of race and the comparison between Blacks in Africa and America. The three of them are contemporary and mirror the current and present status of the African immigrants in America. They are written by three young, female, African writers who themselves lived in Africa and migrated to the United States to finish their studies and to pursue their American dream. Hence, the authors' depiction of the journey of African immigrants is a true reflection of authentic experiences that most western writers tend to mask and to ignore in order to save the image of America. Therefore, the selected literary works should be considered as concrete sources of awareness as they bring to light the subjugation and the oppression that Africans endure because of immigration. They are rich with fictional stories which are not far from reality through the eyes of contemporary African immigrant characters who left their countries voluntarily seeking a better life.

Americanah, *We Need New Names* and *Behold the Dreamers* are suitable for conducting this study as we intend to extensively explore them in the lens of postcolonial theory where displacement, identity, otherness and mimicry will be the core of analyzing the novels as Bhabha argues that, "there is a built in resistance in texts produced by postcolonial writers and this is often exposed through hybridization and colonial mimicry" (Bhabha 24). Therefore, we will discover how these contemporary writers have depicted the single story that Africans have about America and the other way around, and how they have resisted the western stereotypical beliefs concerning the absolute failure of African immigrants who crush into a totally strange social context. The selected literary works have not been studied from a social psychological point of view which gives this thesis the chance to stand out with its interdisciplinary exploration using both the Social Identity Theory and The Nigerscense Theory. These theories will be applied to delve into the characters' journey to self-discovery and acceptance as they embrace their true Black identity and culture.

Other literary works would have been used to further expand the thesis but they happen to be inconvenient and do not serve at achieving the objectives of this study. Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) is a contemporary historical African novel which talks about two separated sisters and their descendants. It is set back in the slavery era where the intertwined histories of Ghana and the United States are told from the 1700s to the present day. The reason why this novel cannot be used in this thesis is due to the forced emigration which does not fit the case of the other selected texts that have voluntary immigration as a background in the characters' lives. Another contemporary work is *Freshwater* (2018) by the Nigerian Akwaeke Emezi who succeeded in exploring the metaphysics of identity through her main character who migrates to America and develops separate selves. However, these multiple selves are not due to immigration but they are the result of a more powerful spirits which take over her. Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Different* (2013) is a novel which portrays the story of a Nigerian living in London and how she goes back to Nigeria for a job assignment. The fact that her return was involuntary as she has always refused to go back after finishing her studies which makes this novel unsuitable for this research.

1.10 Definition of Terms

1. Displacement: “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (Ashcroft et al. 81).
2. Mimicry: is a way of acting like the ones who are believed to be inferior in order to be considered one of them. It symbolizes a way of manifestation and transformation “Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha 86).
3. Othering: The Other – with the capital ‘O’ – has been called the *grande-autre* by Lacan, the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity (Ashcroft et al. 187).
4. Social identity refers to the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership (Tajfel 292).
5. Social categorization is a means of systematizing and ordering the social environment particularly with regard to its role as a guide for action, and as a reflection of social values. It also provides a system of orientation which creates and defines the individual’s own place in society (Tajfel 293).
6. Individual Mobility: “implies attempts, on an individual basis, to achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower- to a higher- status group” (Tajfel & Turner 19).
7. Nigrescence: designed to examine the process of becoming black as argued by Cross (1994) “Most identity models start not at the point of change but with an analysis on the identity *to be changed*” (122).

1.11 Conclusion

The process of embracing one’s Black identity is explicitly present in the selected novels which reflect the journey of immigrants’ road to self-acceptance as Black Africans in the American society. Therefore, to figure out the process that enables the African immigrants embrace their Black identity, it is necessary to understand their history and what made them devalue their identity first. Then, we will study their identity in a social context according to their identifications and categorizations. The previously mentioned steps are crucial to study the objectives and answers the questions set for this thesis. The interdisciplinary nature of this work with its merge between literary and social psychological theories in literary analysis, will give us rich and profound insights into the selected novels.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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